600 Young Models Eye Global Spotlight, Audition for ARISE Fashion Week

Sunday Ehigiator

As preparations for the 20th edition of ARISE Fashion Week (AFW) gathers steam, 600 young models would be competing in an audition to feature in what have been described as Africa's most influential runway show.

Those selected at the audition which kicked off this Tuesday, would feature on the runway of AFW scheduled for 2nd to 4th February 2023, at Eko Hotel Convention Centre, Lagos.

According to a statement from the organisers, models, both aspiring and established, were given the chance to audition in front of an expert panel made up of ARISE Fashion Week Creative Director, Desirée Ejoh; BETH Models CEO, Elizabeth Isiorho; THISDAY Style Executive Editor and AFW Casting Director, Konye Nwabogor, and serial entrepreneur, Taofick Okoya.

"The model casting this year was focused on finding great new

Continued on page 10

Sirika: Govt to Activate Act Prohibiting Strike Action By Airport Workers... Page 35

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CBN, FCTA Step Up Sensitisation Campaign on Naira Redesign Project... Page 34

PDP to Conduct Fresh Guber Primary in Abia Following Ikonne's Death

- *Atiku, Ikpeazu, Ayu, Otti, Emenike, others mourn*
- *He died of multiple cardiac arrests, his family reveals*

Emmanuel Ugwu in Umuahia, Onyebuchi Ezigbo and Adedayo Akinwale in Abuja

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has directed the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Abia State to conduct a fresh primary election in the next 14 days to replace its governorship candidate, Professor Uche Eleazar Ikonne, who died yesterday in Abuja.

A statement from Ikonne's family said he died of "multiple cardiac arrests".

In directing PDP to replace its governorship candidate, INEC clarified that the deputy governorship candidate of the party could not automatically assume the position of the gubernatorial candidate since the election was yet to start.

INEC National Commissioner on Voter Education and Publicity, Festus Okoye, told THISDAY that the party had the opportunity of conducting a fresh primary within

Continued on page 10

Tinubu: Petrol Scarcity, Naira Redesign Ploy to Sabotage My Victory in the Election

- *Let fuel be scarce, change ink of naira, I will win, declares former Lagos governor*
- *Atiku to Tinubu: currency redesign has destroyed your bullion van plan*
- *Insists attacking president won't save his failing campaign*

James Sowole in Abeokuta

A new twist was yesterday added to the current fuel scarcity in the country and the decision of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to redesign the N200, N500 and 1,000 banknotes, as the presidential candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, alleged that both events were contrived to sabotage his victory at next month's election.

Tinubu said he would win, despite the disruptions.

But in a swift reaction to Tinubu's comments, the presidential candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar, alleged that the APC candidate was frustrated by his inability to stop the cashless policy and currency redesign of the CBN. Atiku said the monetary policies would curb vote buying and enhance the credibility of next month's election, claiming Tinubu

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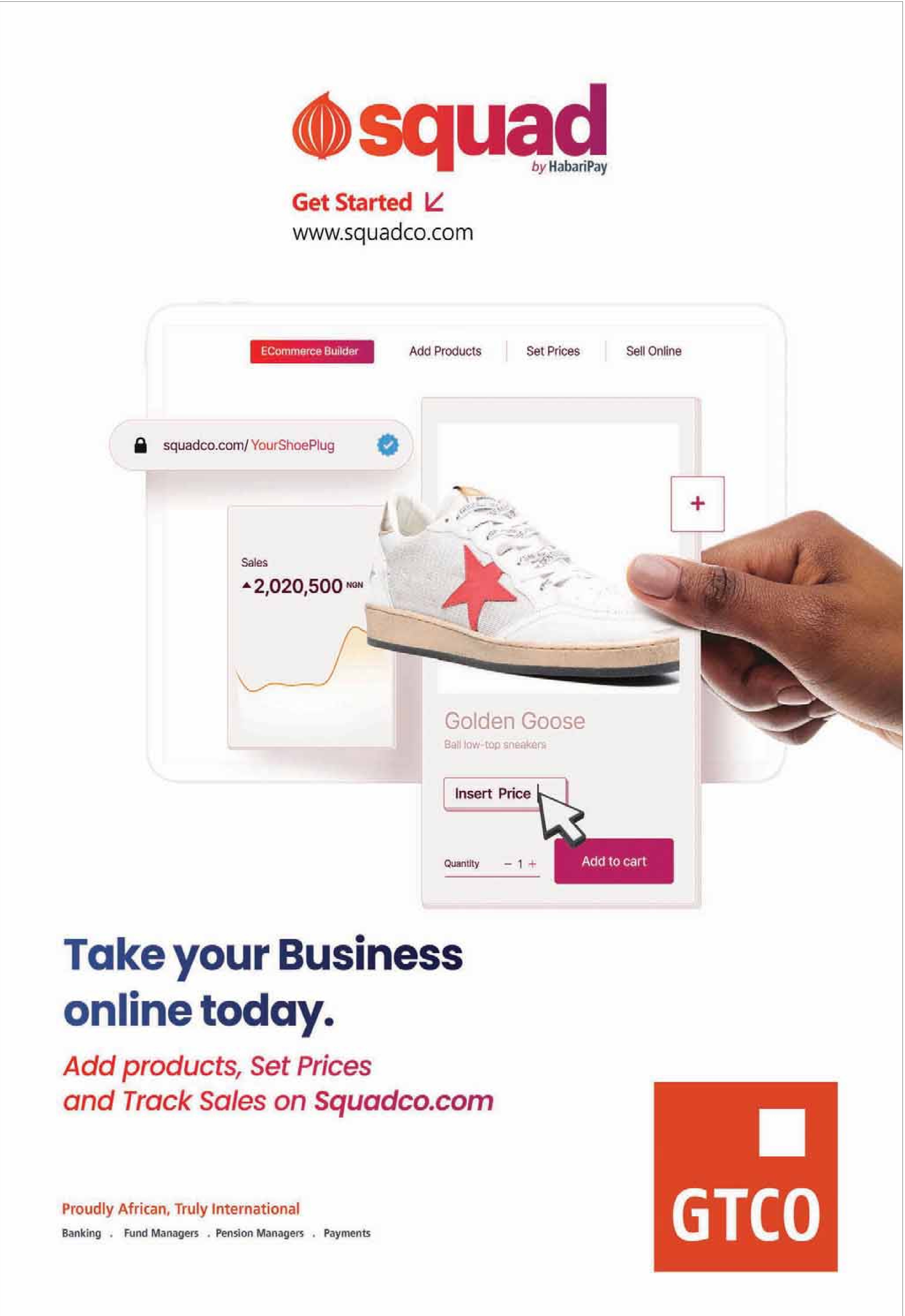
2ND DAKAR AGRIC SUMMIT...

L-R: Presidents Andry Rajoelina of Madagascar; Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria; Macky Sall of Senegal and Emmerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe, during the second Dakar International Conference on Agriculture held in Dakar, Senegal...yesterday

PHOTO: SUNDAY AGHAEZE.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LANDMARK PROJECT INAUGURATION...

L-R: Member representing Aniocha/Oshimili Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, Hon. Ndudi Elumelu; former President of the Senate, Dr. Bukola Saraki; Director General, Peoples Democratic Party Presidential Campaign Council and Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Mr. Emmanuel Udom; PDP Vice Presidential and Delta State Governor, Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa; Presidential candidate of PDP, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar; National Chairman of PDP, Dr. Iyorchia Ayu; former Vice President of Nigeria, Mr. Namadi Sambo; Governor of Sokoto and Director-General of PDP Presidential Campaign Council, Alhaji Aminu Tambuwal, during the inauguration of the Koka Junction, Asaba-Benin Expressway Interchange and Flyover in Asaba…yesterday

Buhari to African Leaders: Show Political Will, Commitment to Agriculture Transformation

●Lauds AfDB, other partners' provision of $538.05m for Nigeria's agro-industrial processing zones

Deji Elumoye in Abuja

President Muhammadu Buhari has called on his fellow African leaders to demonstrate the political will and re-commit themselves to the total transformation of agriculture in the continent.

The president also welcomed the provision of $538.05 million by the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Islamic Development Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development for the first phase of the Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ) for Nigeria programme.

Delivering a goodwill message to the Feed Africa Summit of Heads of State and Government in Dakar, Senegal, yesterday, Buhari, according to a statement issued by his Media Adviser, Femi Adesina, urged his counterparts to embrace innovative policies that would ensure that the continent's citizens eat what they produce as well as export the surplus.

With rising inflation globally and the effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict that have driven up food prices, especially for basic staples such as wheat and maize, he listed measures that African leaders must take to change the status quo.

According to him: "Feeding Africa is an imperative.

"We must ensure that we feed ourselves today, tomorrow, and well into the future. The starting point is to raise agricultural productivity. This requires the access of farmers to quality farm inputs, especially improved seeds, and fertilizers and mechanisation.

"To succeed, we must strongly support farmers. There is no doubt that we need to subsidise our farmers, but we must do so in ways that are transparent, remove rent seeking behavior and effectively deliver support to farmers.

"The share of budget allocation to agriculture should be increased across Africa, especially for investments in critical public goods, such as research and development, infrastructure, especially roads, irrigation, and energy.

"As leaders, let us decisively ensure that we meet the 10 per cent allocation of our budgets to agriculture as agreed in the Malabo Declaration of the African Heads of State and Government.

"We must reduce the rate of rural to urban migration through the development of rural areas," he said.

Buhari noted that the future of agriculture in Africa would depend on getting more youth into agriculture, which means making agriculture attractive for them.

He said: "To feed Africa, we need younger male and female farmers. We must also ensure that they get access to land, finance, technologies, information, and markets."

He, therefore, requested that the Food and Agriculture Delivery Compacts arising from the Summit must address ways to improve empowerment of the youth and women in agriculture.

"We must take into consideration climate change and ensure that agricultural systems are climate-smart and climate-resilient.

"We must invest heavily in irrigation to help address increasing frequency of droughts that are leading to decline in crop yields.

"I am convinced that the very targeted and bold approach of using the Food and Agriculture Delivery Compacts will allow Africa to finally break through and feed itself.

"Feeding Africa is not negotiable. Africa must grow what her citizens eat. As leaders, we must demonstrate political will and re- commit ourselves to producing for the continent's needs, including surpluses for export."

The president applauded the efforts of the African Development Bank to launch SAPZ, recounting that he had launched the scheme in Nigeria in October 2022.

"The Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones for Nigeria, which is in the first phase will cover seven States in the Federation.

"These very innovative public-private partnership models will help us to transform the agriculture sector much faster and use it to generate wealth.

"They will also allow our countries to develop integrated infrastructure around our agricultural processes and add value to the production of crops, livestock, and fisheries," he said.

Commenting on SAPZ funding for Nigeria, President Buhari said: 'I am pleased with the partnership approach used for Nigeria by the multilateral financing institutions, with the African Development Bank providing $210 million, the Islamic Development Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development providing $310 million, and the Government of Nigeria providing $18.05 million.

"The Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones are game changers for the structural transformation of the agricultural sector.

"I therefore urge that as we develop the Food and Agriculture Delivery Compacts from this Summit, special attention should be placed on the development of Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones."

Buhari also used the occasion to call for affordable financing to support smallholder and commercial farmers, underscoring the need for dedicated financing windows from the central banks.

"Access to affordable finance is critical for the success of efforts to support smallholder farmers and commercial farmers. Commercial banks do not lend much to agriculture due to the perception of high risks.

Constitution Amendment: Like Senate, House Transmits 35 Bills to Buhari

Udora Orizu in Abuja

The House of Representatives has directed the Clerk to the National Assembly to transmit the 35 bills that have so far met the requirement of the provisions of Section 9(2) of the Constitution to President Muhammadu Buhari for assent.

The 35 proposed legislations were considered by 27 State Houses of Assembly and approved by at least 24 state assemblies as required by law.

The state houses lawmakers however rejected nine bills including the proposed legislation for financial and administrative autonomy for local government councils.

The House urged the following State Houses of Assembly - Gombe, Jigawa, Kebbi, Kwara, Oyo, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, and Zamfara - yet to forward their resolution on the bills to do so in fulfillment of their constitutionally imposed legislative obligation to the constitution amendment process.

The resolution to transmit the 35 bills followed the adoption of a motion sponsored by Hon. Ahmed Idris Wase,

Hon. Ndudi Godwin Elumelu, Hon. Hassan Fulata and 68 other lawmakers at plenary yesterday.

Moving the motion, Fulata recalled that 68 bills seeking to alter provisions of the constitution were presented at the floor of the House of Representatives and the Senate on Wednesday, 23 February, 2022 for passage.

He also recalled that the House of Representatives and the Senate had approved 44 of the bills without differences and were transmitted to the State Houses of Assembly for their resolutions on the 27 March, 2022.

While acknowledging that 27 Houses of Assembly forwarded their resolutions on the proposed legislations, he said the under listed 35 Constitution Alteration Bills had satisfied the provisions of Section 9 (2) of the Constitution, for passage into law, having been approved by not less than 24 State Houses of Assembly.

Fulata said, "Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 3–(Change of Names of Afikpo North and Afikpo South Local Government Areas (Ebonyi State);

(b) Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 4–Change of Name of Kunchi Local Government Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 5–Change of Names of Egbado North and Egbado South Local Government Areas (Ogun State);

Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 7–Correction of the name of Atigbo Local Government Area (Oyo State);

Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 8–Correction of Name of Obia/Akpor Local Government Area (Rivers State);

Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 9–Financial autonomy of State legislatures and State Judiciary; Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 10–Enforcement of Legislative Summon; Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 11–Inauguration of Members-Elect.

"Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 21–Deletion of reference in the Constitution to the provisions of the Criminal Code, Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Act, Criminal Procedure Code or Evidence Act; Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 22–Provision for Intervening Events in the Computation of Time for the Determination of Pre-Election Petitions, Election Petitions and Appeals therefrom; Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 24–Expansion of the Interpretation of Judicial Office; Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 25–Appointment of Secretary of the National Judicial Council; Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 29–Devolution of Powers (Airports); Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 30–Devolution of Powers (Fingerprints, identification and criminal records); Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 31–Devolution of Powers (Correctional Services); Constitution (Fifth Alteration) Bill No. 32–Devolution of Powers (Railways);

Continues online

US Announces Visa Restrictions on Individuals Undermining Nigeria's Democratic Process

Adedayo Akinwale in Abuja

The United States government has announced its decision to impose visa restrictions on individuals involved in undermining the democratic process in Nigeria.

The US Secretary of States, Antony Blinken made the announcement in a statement published yesterday on the website of the US Department of State.

He said the US government was committed to supporting and advancing democracy in Nigeria and around the world.

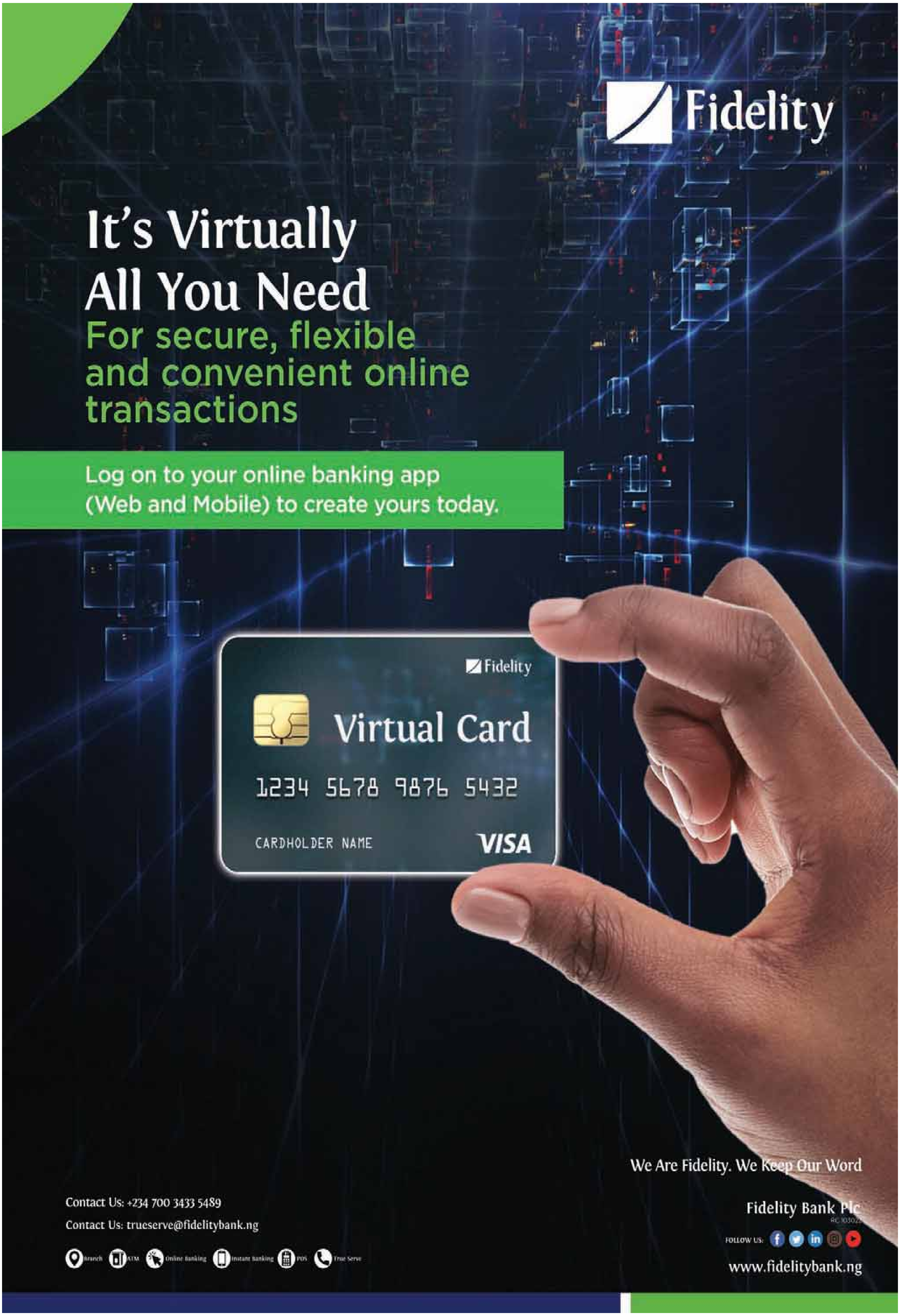
Blinken stated: "Today (Wednesday), I am announcing visa restrictions on specific individuals in Nigeria for undermining the democratic process in a recent Nigerian election.

"Under Section 212(a)(3)C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, these individuals will be found ineligible for visas to the United States under a policy to restrict visas of those believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining democracy in Nigeria.

"Certain family members of such persons may also be subject to these restrictions. Additional persons who undermine the democratic process in Nigeria—including in the lead-up to, during, and following Nigeria's 2023 elections—may be found ineligible for U.S. visas under this policy.

"The visa restrictions announced today are specific to certain individuals and are not directed at the Nigerian people or the Government of Nigeria."

Blinken added that the decision to impose visa restrictions reflected the commitment of the United States to support Nigerian aspirations to combat corruption and strengthen democracy and the rule of law.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NEWS

APC OGUN RALLY...

L-R: Speaker, House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabiamila; Lagos State governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu; former governor of Ogun State, Olusegun Osoba; Vice Presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Kashim Shettima, APC presidential candidate, Bola Tinubu and the host governor, Dapo Abiodun at the party's campaign rally held inside the main bowl of Moshood Abiola Stadium... yesterday

Lawmakers Urge NNPCL to End Prolonged Fuel Scarcity

●Seek arrest of oil marketers sabotaging govt's effort ●To meet relevant regulatory agencies today

Udora Orizu in Abuja

The House of Representatives at plenary yesterday, called on the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) to urgently end the prolonged fuel scarcity and ease queues in filling stations in most cities in the country.

The House also urged relevant security agencies to fish out those oil marketers and other economic saboteurs that maybe responsible for the fuel scarcity across the country.

The lawmakers mandated the relevant House Committees to investigate the matter within 48 hours and invite the relevant regulatory authority to appear before the House of Representatives at 2pm today.

The resolutions of the lawmakers were sequel to the adoption of a motion of urgent national importance sponsored by, Hon. Leke Abejide.

Moving the motion, Abejide noted that NNPC Limited was the only importer of petrol, in the country. He also noted that the National Assembly had approved money for petrol subsidy so as to mitigate against unforeseen circumstances in the areas of shortages of the product.

Abejide recalled that for over three months, there have been persistent scarcity of petrol in many parts of the country and the situation appeared to be getting worse.

He lamented that as a result of petrol scarcity Nigerians were not finding it easy in their day-to-day activities.

Abejide said, "Aware that there are uneven pump prices being dispensed by the filling stations across the country which fields speculations that government may have begun to remove subsidy on petrol.

"Also aware that there is the allegation of drop in petrol supply to marketers by private depots which is creating a dangerous mindset in the country.

"Concerned that the current fuel crisis across the country may worsen in the days ahead with the introduction of a N16.00 per liter charge. Also concerned that another contributing factor to the scarcity of the product may be unconnected with the increased cost of hiring daughter vessels in the hike in liter charges which hitherto were paid in naira but now being charged in dollars.

"Further concerned that the scarcity is associated with saboteurs among some of the key stakeholders who deliberately manipulated the system. Worried that due to the scarcity Nigerians are exposed to all sorts of hardships which has resulted in a hike in transportation fares and high cost of some major food items."

CBN, NIBSS to Unveil Domestic Card Scheme Today

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in conjunction with the Nigeria Inter Bank Settlement Systems (NIBSS) Plc, the Bankers Committee and other financial ecosystem stakeholders would launch the National Domestic Card Scheme today.

The new domestic card scheme is a robust in-country scheme tailored to address the specific requirements of Nigeria's payment industry and provide innovative offerings to the Nigerian market and beyond.

The scheme would transform the domestic and African payment landscape through the promotion of innovation in the payment, enhancement of interoperability domestically and internationally and improvement in the suite of products and solutions offerings by banks and other financial institutions such as debit, credit, virtual, loyalty and tokenised cards.

According to a statement yesterday, the National Domestic Card set to be delivered to over 200 million Nigerians offers unique value propositions through enhanced data sovereignty and transaction security, better pricing opportunities, reduced demand for forex, enhanced financial access and support of the growth of a robust and inclusive digital economy, amongst others.

"The brand unveiling of the new Domestic Card Scheme by CBN and NIBSS will be take place on Thursday 26th January at a virtual event that will be graced by critical stakeholders in the financial ecosystem such as the Governor of the CBN, Deputy Governors of the CBN, the Director General Securities and Exchange Commission and Managing Director of the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation.

"Also expected at the event are representatives of multilateral agencies, Switches and Processors, Payment Service Banks, Mobile Money Operators, Payment Terminal Service Providers, Payment Solutions Service Providers, card manufacturers and industry associations.

The launch of this historic Scheme presents a new dawn in the Nigerian payment ecosystem and unveils the unique opportunities presented by the Nigerian retail landscape. It is indeed the beginning of a new era, charting the future of the payment landscape as the first Domestic Card Scheme to be launched on the African continent," the statement added.

Senate Dumps Buhari's N22.7tn Ways and Means, Adjourns for Campaigns

Sunday Aborisade in Abuja

The Senate yesterday failed to consider for possible approval, the N22.7 trillion Ways and Means Restructuring request forwarded to it by President Muhammadu Buhari in December, 2022.

Buhari had three weeks ago, warned that Nigeria was at risk of incurring additional N1. 8 trillion if the Senate failed to pass the request for restructuring the ways and means.

He stated this when he assented to the 2023 budget.

The red chamber which had promised to consider the request before proceeding for the election break, failed to list it for consideration during plenary

The leader of the Senate, Ibrahim Gobir, who is the Chairman of the special committee set up for the purpose of getting details of the document from the relevant heads of federal agencies, did not say anything about it throughout the plenary session.

The President of the Senate, Ahmad Lawan, had last week Tuesday, declared that the Senate was ready to approve the request, provided required details of the spending were made available by the Finance Minister, Zainab Ahmed and Governor of the Central Bank, Godwin Emefiele.

Lawan had said the Senate and by extension, the House of Representatives would have adjourned plenary if not for Restructuring of the Ways and Means request.

The Senator Gobir led committee did not present any report for consideration by the Senate this Tuesday and Wednesday, making the Senate to adjourn without approving it as earlier planned. THISDAY gathered that the expected details from the executive arm of government on how the N22.7 trillion was expended within 10 years, were not provided.

ACJHR Hails CBN's Cash Swap Policy

Sunday Aborisade in Abuja

A civil society organisation, the African Centre for Justice and Human Rights (ACJHR) has described the Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Mr. Godwin Emefiele, as a man who has shown that his heart is geared towards the upliftment of the poor with cash swap initiative introduced by the CBN.

The central bank had launched the cash swap programme as a means to reach out to the grassroots that have limited access to banks and other payment channels, to enable them bring in their old notes before the January 31 deadline.

The CBN's decision to launch the cash swap programme came amid commercial bank's failure to make the new naira notes available despite threats of sanctions.

Owing to this, the group in a statement by its strategic communication consultant, Abubakar Isa said with the latest initiative Emefiele could be deemed, "to be monetary policy 'God', who has shown his heart is with the upliftment of the poor."

Isa said the cash swap programme was a master protective strategy for the vulnerable and economically disadvantaged.

According to him, Emefiele and President Muhammadu Buhari deserved praises for introducing the initiative for the unbanked population.

The statement read, "Emefiele's recent monetary policies are commendable and will leave a positive imprint in the country's economy in the long run.

"There has been complains in some quarters on the reach and sensitisation of some people, particularly in the rural areas regarding the old naira swap deadline, but the CBN is always ahead with great ideas and solutions and this POS cash swap initiative is the answer.

"The CBN when announcing the cash swap programme noted that the initiative was aimed at enabling citizens in rural areas or those with limited access to formal financial services to exchange old naira notes for the redesigned notes.

"To promote financial inclusion, the CBN said the service was also available to anybody without a bank account.

"The CBN, in a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document, also stated that before an interested party can be approved as an agent, some information like the individual's name, BVN number, and operator's name are required before the new notes will be released.

"This initiative and others recently introduced by the bank would help put a stop to money laundering, vote buying, ransom taking, counterfeiting and so on."

NBCC 2023 ECONOMIC OUTLOOK SESSION...

L-R: Chairman Programmes Committee Nigerian-British Chamber of Commerce (NBCC), Tajudeen Ahmed; CEO, Financial Derivatives Company Limited and Guest Speaker, Bismarck Rewane; President/ Chairman of NBCC Council, Bisi Adeyemi: Moderator, Wole Famurewa, and Chairman, Advocacy Committee, Anne Rinu, at the NBCC 2023 Economic Outlook session held in Lagos... recently

Moghalu to CBN: Pause Further Increase in MPR, Assert Your Independence

Dike Onwuamaeze

Barely 24 hours after Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) resolved to raise the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) by 100 basis points from 16.5 per cent to 17.5 per cent and declared that, "lending to the government as the banker of last resort is normal," the Institute for Governance and Economic Transformation (IGET) has released a report in which it advised the CBN to halt further increase of its MPR and reduce its ways and means funding of the federal government's budget deficit in order to keep the inflation rate in the country stable.

The IGET gave this advice in its latest Policy Brief publication titled, "Inflation and Poverty in Nigeria: Explainer," that was authored by a former Deputy Governor of CBN, Prof. Kingsley Moghalu and Mr. Damian Kalu Ude, in which they tasked the CBN to put on its operational independence.

The institute further recommended that the federal government should tame its appetite for fiscal deficit and fix the supply side constraints in the country's economy in order to improve productivity in order to tame the galloping inflation in the economy.

The IGET stated: "The CBN should resist the temptation to further increase the Monetary Policy Rate. The deployment of this monetary tightening tool should be put on pause. Prior distortions and contradictions in monetary and foreign exchange, the structural component of inflation in Nigeria, and inflation expectations, have blunted the ability of the MPR to control inflation at this time.

"Tightening the money supply remains important, but this should be pursued through other means of controlling the rate of money creation.

"The CBN has for several years abandoned its operational independence and subordinated itself to political control and partisan interests. Unless that independence is restored, the bank's ability to maintain price stability (by resisting distortions in the money supply based on fiscal/political stimuli) will remain compromised.

"So will its ability to anchor inflation expectations through the MPR, as well as its ability to formulate and execute efficient foreign exchange policy, which also significantly contributes to inflation."

It further stated that, "taming inflation demands urgent government intervention to fix supply side constraints in the economy. Tackling production and productivity constraints, fixing the dysfunctional forex policy, and markedly reducing liquidity injections through ways and means funding of fiscal deficit are important.

"Fiscal deficits should be reduced. While there are arguments that may support fiscal budgeting, Nigeria's economy is not sophisticated enough to support this practice, which creates a temptation to resort to excessive borrowings, including those from the CBN that are above legally permissible limits.

"The major focus of the federal government should be improving its revenue generation by reducing taxation levels while expanding the tax net and abolish wasteful waivers to the commercial sector."

The IGET also expressed concerns that the country's inflation trend might not have reached its peak considering that triggers like intermittent fuel scarcity witnessed during the past four months, stubbornly high gas and energy prices, lingering currency pressures and build-up of higher Naira liquidity as the 2023 general election approaches, are yet to be addressed.

It, however, stated that the country's inflation had been poorly managed by the CBN, which has the statutory responsibility to maintain price stability, i.e., manage inflation, under the current administration of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Now, "everyone is paying the price. As the 2023 elections draw near, the inflation outlook is even grimmer, as prices outpace earnings, pushing more into poverty.

"Although the CBN is making efforts to curb the rising inflation by increasing interest rates, its funding of the fiscal deficit through the Ways and Means Advances has undermined the bank's efforts," IGET stated.

It attributed sources of inflationary pressure in Nigeria to lack of flexible foreign exchange management, trade restrictions, and conflicting monetary policy goals.

It averred that Nigeria's headline inflation has continued to rise, hitting a new high of 21.47 per cent in November 2022 from 21.09 per cent in October 2022, according to the National Bureau of Statistics' report released in December 2022.

"It is unlikely that the current inflationary surge will subside quickly; economic history suggests otherwise," the report said.

It added that the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) recently released data about Nigeria's inflation level and worsening poverty, citing it (inflation) as a key driver for the rising number of poor people in the country.

Transport Owners Laud FG on 14-man Petrol Supply Panel, Decry Illegal Diversion of Products

Emmanuel Addeh in Abuja

The President of the Nigerian Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO), Alhaji Yusuf Othman, yesterday stressed that the 14-man steering committee on petroleum products supply and distribution management chaired by President Muhammadu Buhari, would markedly address the current nationwide shortages.

THISDAY recalls that the team which has the Minister of State, Petroleum Resources, Timipre Sylva as its alternate chairman has among its terms of reference, to ensure national strategic stock management.

It will also ensure visibility on the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC) refineries rehabilitation programme and implement end-to-end tracking of petroleum products, especially Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) to ascertain daily national consumption as well as eliminate smuggling.

In a chat with journalists in Abuja, Othman decried what he called the deliberate distortion of the narrative surrounding the shortfall and non-availability of the products by certain forces in the downstream sector.

He insisted that the purveyors of the reports blaming the NNPC retail outlets for scarcity of the products were not exactly right, dismissing the claim as unfounded.

"We note that certain players in the sector who lack the capacity for storage and effective distribution are deliberately pushing the false narrative into the public domain to demonise the NNPC retail outlets," the NARTO boss stated.

He maintained that public expectations were being met by the oil giant retail outlets which sell petrol at the officially stipulated price.

"Whatever is written is not true, it is false. As far as we are concerned the NNPC retailers are the largest retail outlet in the country. As of today, they are the only marketing company that sells fuel at the same price everywhere in the country.

"The same price in Lagos, same price in Abuja. So you will see some envy by other marketers and from experience. Personally, my own company has been working with NNPC retail in the last 15 years. I know their pedigree and their capacity," he maintained.

Othman appealed to his members and others involved in the haulage of petroleum products to refrain from activities that could sabotage the federal government's efforts to surmount the challenge crippling effective movement of goods and services.

"Let me use this opportunity to call on our law abiding and patriotic members who are into the transportation of petroleum products to please desist from illegal bunkering, smuggling and diversion of petroleum products because these actions are detrimental to the economy of our great nation.

" This association will not support, defend, or sympathise with anyone caught committing these crimes, " he added.

Asked to give the timeline for the end to scarcity, the NARTO president noted that some of the contributing factors were beyond the control of the federal government.

"Relating to the current supply and availability of petroleum products is not unconnected with the current Russia-Ukraine war. Two, is the high cost of transporting from the mother vessels to the daughter vessels to the tank farms. Three, the exchange rate. But I know we have adequate fuel," he insisted.

He equally pleaded with the federal government to look at the high operational cost of doing business being experienced by players in the haulage of petroleum products.

"In terms of our rising operational cost, we are merely trying to breakeven. The most important and primary input in our operations is Automotive Gas Oil (AGO) which is the major energy source used by our trucks.

"Unfortunately, however, the average the major energy sources used as of November 2022, was N808.87 as against N277.89.

"Even our mass transit segment was not spared the high operating cost. According to figures obtained from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the average cost of petrol as of November, 2022 was N202.46 per litre against N167.60 per litre in the corresponding period of 2021," NARTO stated.

According to the organisation, this was an increase of 20.81 per cent. This, he said, means that the situation has worsened this year with petrol prices reaching up to N300 per litre in many states, amid acute fuel scarcity that has persisting in the country in the last few months.

FG Urged to Reduce Borrowing, Increase IGR by Widening Tax Net

Nume Ekeghe

The Chairman of the Nigeria Economic Summit Group (NESG), Mr. Niyi Yusuf and the Chief Executive Officer of Emerging Africa Capital, Mrs. Toyin Sanni have called on the federal government to reduce its borrowing and increase its level of tax collection.

They made the call yesterday at the Vanguard Economic Discourse where stakeholders converged to discuss "Taming Inflation and Stimulating Growth."

They both agreed that inflation had become a daunting menace and gave recommendations such as the removal of fuel subsidies, collaboration between the fiscal and monetary authorities, reduction in government spending, among others as ways to stimulate economic growth.

Yusuf said: "Government should enhance efficiency and transparency while reviewing all forms of untargeted subsidies, tax waivers, and incentives by increasing non-oil revenues through tax net expansion and collection efficiency."

He added that there should be an integrated fiscal management strategy to expand the funding mix through public-private partnership (PPP), innovative structured finance, and intervention funds.

He added: "Contain Inflation by reducing federal government resort to CBN Finance. The CBN also needs to adopt a single market-reflective exchange rate and there is a need for collaboration between the fiscal and monetary authorities to support the economy."

He also urged the government to facilitate domestic trade and boost value addition through the removal of forex and trade restrictions.

"The CBN also needs to set a clear monetary policy framework that increases access to finance and eliminate risks created by monetisation of CBN ways and means," he added.

On her part, Sanni said: "Inflation will likely continue to trend upwards in the short to medium term due to the intensified fuel scarcity across the country with little or no clarity on possible solutions, the ripple effect of the flood event on agriculture outputs, and the scarce and expensive foreign exchange.

"Nigeria can reduce government spending by cutting back on subsidies and other forms of government support. This can help reduce inflation by decreasing the amount of money in circulation and in increasing taxes, Nigeria can also increase taxes to decrease aggregate demand and help control inflation."

She noted that improving infrastructure and investing in infrastructure could improve the overall efficiency of the economy and increase productivity, which could help to increase economic growth and decrease inflation.

Also, she added that the government could increase transparency in the allocation of resources and in the management of public finances, to improve the overall efficiency of the economy.

"Nigeria's government can take steps to reduce corruption, which can help to improve the overall efficiency of the economy and increase foreign investment."

Equinor Begins Exit from Nigeria, Set to Sell Assets for $1bn

Emmanuel Addeh in Abuja

Norway's Equinor has launched the sale of its stake in an offshore Nigerian oilfield, joining a retreat by Western energy firms from the West African country as they focus on newer and more profitable operations, three industry sources have told Reuters.

The company has hired investment bank Standard Chartered to run the sale process, which could raise up to $1 billion, the sources said. The report said Equinor and Standard Chartered declined to comment.

Equinor was entitled to net production of around 25,000 barrels per day of oil equivalent (boed) through its 20.2 per cent stake in the Agbami field, which is operated by Chevron, according to its website.

Production in the field has been declining rapidly in recent years, down from 36,000 boepd in 2019 and 29,000 boepd in 2020.

Several Western oil giants including Exxon Mobil, Shell and TotalEnergies, are seeking to exit or scale back their presence in Nigeria, particularly in onshore operations which have been plagued by theft and devastating spills for years.

However, Shell was forced to pause the sale of its onshore assets last year after a Supreme Court ruling that said it had to wait for the outcome of an appeal over a 2019 oil spill. Exxon's sale also hit regulatory hurdles.

Equinor's exit is part of the company's efforts to focus on newer and more profitable assets, the sources told Reuters.

Nigeria's offshore oil and gas operations remain lucrative due to their larger scale, better security and attractive financial terms offered by the government.

The oil sector received a boost after Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in 2021 signed into law an oil overhaul bill that had been in the works for nearly two decades and which offered operators long-term fiscal stability.

Equinor launched the sale process after last year signing a deal with Nigeria's national oil company, NNPC to extend by two decades the licence for offshore block OML 128, which is part of the Agbami field.

The Norwegian company, which has been present in Nigeria since 1992, also holds a 53.85 per cent stake in exploration licence OML 129, according to its website.

Equinor's profit soared to a new record last year, driven by European gas prices hitting all-time highs in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine last February.

Operations outside Norway account for around a third of the company's total oil and gas production.

The company stated that it has been in Nigeria since 1992, utilising one of the world's largest floating production, storage and offloading vessels. It notes that it has drilled 10 wells with 40 per cent discovery rate and invested more than $3.5 billion. It is also a supplier of refined products in Nigeria.

TINUBU: PETROL SCARCITY, NAIRA REDESIGN PLOY TO SABOTAGE MY VICTORY IN THE ELECTION

has begun crying over his imminent defeat due to frustration of his strongest strategies.

Adopting a cautiously belligerent tone, Tinubu told a mammoth crowd of APC members and supporters at the party's presidential campaign rally in Abeokuta that the fuel scarcity and naira redesign project were artificially created to discourage people from voting for APC. He said the target was to deny him victory at the February 25 presidential election.

In a vague reference to those he referred to as the powers that be, Tinubu wondered why the fuel scarcity, which began in October last year, had not abated.

The rally held at the MKO Abiola International Stadium in Abeokuta was attended by APC leaders at the state and national levels.

Tinubu alleged that some powerful individuals in the country were behind the fuel crisis and scarcity of the new naira notes, saying they intend to scuttle the coming election.

However, the APC presidential candidate called on the citizens to remain resolute and resist any attempt to stop the elections. He described the forthcoming elections as "a revolution" that would usher in new government.

Tinubu stated, "We will use our PVCs to take over government from them. If they like let them create fuel crisis, even if they say there is no fuel, we will trek to vote. They are full of mischief; they could say there is no fuel. They have been scheming to create fuel crisis, but forget about it. Relax, I Asiwaju, have told you that the issue of fuel supply will be permanently addressed.

"Whoever wants to eat the honey embedded in a mountain won't worry about the axe. Is that not so? And if you want to eat palm kernel, you would bring stone and use it to break it, then the kernel will come out.

"Let them increase the price of fuel, let them continue to hoard fuel, only them know where they have hoarded fuel, they hoarded money, they hoarded naira; we will go and vote and we will win. Even if they changed the ink on naira notes. Whatever their plans, it will come to naught. We are going to win. Those in the PDP will lose."

Tinubu added, "I am homeboy, I have come here, you will not be put to shame, we will take over the government from them, the traitors who wanted to contest with us. They had no experience.

"The great Nigerian youth, the great Nigerian students, the confident Nigerian youth. This is a revolution. This election is a revolution. They are plotting, but they will fail. They said fuel price will increase and reach N200 per litre. Go and relax.

"They don't want this election to hold, they want to scuttle it. Do you agree?

"On this one, I'm guaranteeing you one thing: there will be student loan. Nobody will drop out of the university because of school fees. I guarantee you that. Nobody will have to repeat for eight years and not graduate.

"We are too smart, we are brilliant, we are courageous, we are sharp, we will make a four years course be for four years. Do you agree?

"Will you vote whether there is fuel or not? Call your sister, we are bringing revolution. Let me say what's on my mind. The other day, I told you. This one too, they think they can cause crisis by sabotaging fuel supply. They are sabotaging fuel supply. Whether there is fuel or not, whether there is Okada (motorcycle) or not, whether there is tricycle or not, we will go and vote and we shall win.

"This is a revolution and when I tell you, you know what I mean. You know me, we are going there to win."

Tinubu also called on the people of Ogun State to go all out and collect their Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCs) at the offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). He said they would be able to ensure his victory if they made it a duty to collect their PVCs.

Earlier in his remarks, the governor of Ogun State, Dapo Abiodun, assured the APC presidential candidate that the votes from the state would be 100 per cent for him. Abiodun said Tinubu remained the best deal for the country at this period.

The governor also called on the people to go and collect their PVCs.

But reacting to Tinubu's comments at the Abeokuta rally, Atiku, in a statement by his Special Assistant, Public Communication, Phrank Shaibu, stated that Tinubu was obviously frustrated by his inability to stop the cashless policy and CBN currency redesign project.

Quoting from the Holy Bible, in Proverbs 28:1, which says, "The wicked run when no one is chasing them, but an honest person is as brave as a lion," (Good News Translation), to buttress his point, Shaibu stated, "Even though the CBN policy affects all 18 political parties, Tinubu is the only one frustrated because his plan to deploy bullion vans and bribe poor voters and security agents on the day of election has failed woefully.

"Recall that on the eve of the 2019 presidential election, two cash laden bullion vans were pictured entering Tinubu's premises located on 26 Bourdillon Road, Ikoyi. Several petitions were written to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) but nothing was done.

"Also frustrated by President Muhammadu Buhari's unwillingness to attend some of his insipid rallies, Tinubu launched an attack against the president, who doubles as the Minister of Petroleum."

Responding to Tinubu's accusation that the fuel scarcity was artificially created to sabotage his victory at the poll, Shaibu said, "It is funny that Tinubu is just commenting over the fuel scarcity, which started in different parts of the country as far back as February 2022. In Lagos, where Tinubu claims to be the landlord, the state has been witnessing fuel queues since last November.

"It is, therefore, dubious of Tinubu to try to extricate himself from the failures of his party because elections are 30 days away.

"Like his previous colourless rallies, the discombobulated APC candidate vowed that his supporters would use their PVCs to 'chase them out of power next month'.

"Tinubu urgently needs to be on medication since he has forgotten that his party is currently in office. How can the APC defeat the APC?

"Besides, the so-called Lagos godfather, who says he will remove petrol subsidy on his first day in office, if he wins, told the people of Ogun State that he will push the price of petrol below N200 per litre. It is obvious that he has not even read his own manifesto.

"Tinubu's paranoia is clearly getting the best of him. He has gone from attacking the leader of his own party to Igbos and northerners all because he believes they are not supporting his failed presidential ambition.

"For a man who claimed to have single-handedly made Buhari president, it is funny that he is now running from pillar to post all in a bid to save what is left of his failed campaign.

"As we stated last week, Nigeria will not recover from a Tinubu presidency. This son of Barranquilla, who has undisputed ties to drug lords in the United States, cannot be trusted with the leadership of Nigeria.

"A man, who tacitly admitted to drug trafficking by forfeiting $460,000 to American authorities, cannot be given the keys to Nigeria's treasury.

"Having seen his imminent defeat at the polls, he is already using the fuel scarcity and naira redesign as excuses. Tinubu should throw in the towel or get ready to be disgraced on February 25, 2023. A word is enough for the wise."

In a related development, spokesperson of Atiku/Okowa Campaign Organisation, Kola Ologbondiyan, also berated Tinubu for trying to blackmail Buhari and blame the "APC-led federal government over his looming devastating rejection by Nigerians."

A statement signed by Ologbondiyan said, "Our campaign finds it pathetic that Asiwaju Tinubu is seeking a face-saving measure ahead of his shattering electoral defeat by shedding crocodile tears and claiming that the redesigning of the naira notes and the fuel crisis under the APC administration, which he has reportedly been corruptly benefitting, were plots to scuttle the 2023 general election.

Continued on page 36

600 YOUNG MODELS EYE GLOBAL SPOTLIGHT, AUDITION FOR ARISE FASHION WEEK

faces who will join fashion stars from previous ARISE shows," said Ejoh.

"Previous models discovered by ARISE have gone on to have successful careers and take part in international shows and campaigns for brands like Gucci, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Louis Vittion and many, many more. At ARISE, we aim to discover more new faces and continue to be a leader and advance the industry forward."

Nwabogor, who has witnessed firsthand how AFW has been a life-changing platform for unknown faces, said, "The turnout was impressive. What was even more refreshing was the number of new faces. I think overall we have over 40 models who have never been on the ARISE Fashion Week Runway.

"While everyone talks about the designers who through the ARISE brand are allowed to showcase their talent to a global audience, no one talks about the models who are open to the same opportunities. This year's event will not be different."

ARISE as a platform has always been the first to showcase new talents, many of whom have gone on to achieve remarkable success on the global stage.

Isiorho, whose agency BETH Models launched the careers of international successes like Mayowa Nicholas, Davidson Obennebo and Nyagua Ruea, described AFW as one of the best platforms for discovering new talents.

"All the major international modeling agencies keep up with ARISE Fashion Week religiously. They are constantly watching to see which new faces will be on the runway, and often this translates to big opportunities for African models in many of the world's fashion capitals," she said.

Some of the world's most iconic models have graced the ARISE Fashion Week runway, including Alec Wek, Grace Jones and of course, Naomi Campbell.

However, ARISE continuously pushes the envelope for African fashion by placing promising new talents on the same runway as these established icons, celebrating previous generations while placing a spotlight firmly on the new.

PDP TO CONDUCT FRESH GUBER PRIMARY IN ABIA FOLLOWING IKONNE'S DEATH

14 days, according to the dictates of the Electoral Act.

Okoye said the 14 days started from the day Ikonne died.

The national commissioner stated, "He (the deputy governorship candidate) can only fly the flag if election has commenced. They have to hold a fresh primary within 14 days of the death and then they submit to INEC."

The family of Ikonne formally announced the demise of the Abia PDP governorship hopeful yesterday, saying he passed on by 4am at the National Hospital Abuja "after a brief illness".

In a three paragraph statement, the son of the deceased, Dr. Uche-Ikonne Chikezie, said his late father had shown signs of recovery after receiving, "proper treatment" abroad. Chikezie said his father relapsed in return and eventually succumbed to "multiple cardiac arrests."

The statement said of Ikonne, "He was recovering after taking proper treatment in the United Kingdom but relapsed a few days ago leading to multiple cardiac arrests for which he didn't recover from."

The family spokesman added that "further details and arrangements would be made known to the public after deliberations and meetings are made within the family".

After months of speculations on the whereabouts of Ikonne, Ikpeazu had finally admitted during a radio programme last week that the governorship hopeful was, "lately indisposed".

But he had assured the people that the sick candidate was recovering gradually and progressively, adding that he would "return sooner or later".

Meanwhile, PDP, its presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, the governor of Abia State, Dr. Ikpeazu Okezie, governorship candidate of Labour Party (LP), Dr. Alex Otti, and other well-meaning Nigerians have sent their condolences over the incident.

Atiku mourns death of Abia governorship candidate

In the statement issued by his media adviser, Paul Ibe, Atiku described Ikonne as an erudite scholar of repute with vast experience in administration, whose contributions in advancing knowledge within the academic community would be appreciated by generations unborn.

He said as a strong member of the PDP, who should have led PDP to victory in the forthcoming general election in Abia State, Ikonne's death came as a rude shock.

Ikpeazu directed that all flags at Abia State PDP offices should be flown at half-mast as a mark of respect for the party's late standard bearer.

The governor, in a press statement he personally signed, directed that the ruling party should halt all campaign activities at all levels till Monday, January 30.

Ikpeazu, who had anointed Ikonne as his successor, mourned the demise of the governorship candidate, adding, "It is with a heavy heart but total submission to the will of God that we announce the passing of our PDP governorship candidate for the 2023 general election, Prof Eleazar Uchenna Ikonne,."

The Abia chief executive and leader of the ruling PDP in the state urged all PDP leaders and members "to remain calm as we navigate through this difficult period together."

Also, the governorship candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Chief Ikechi Emenike, expressed sadness over the death of the PDP governorship candidate.

In a statement issued in Umuahia, Emenike said he received "the bad news with rude shock."

He described the death of his fellow governorship contender as "a sad development for Abia State in the ongoing democratic process."

The National Working Committee (NWC) of PDP directed that the party's flags at the national secretariat, Abuja, be flown at half-mast in mourning the death of Ikonne.

Its National Publicity Secretary, Hon. Debo Ologunagba, in a statement issued yesterday, said Ikonne was an outstanding and committed member of the party who contributed to its continued success in Abia State and in the country.

The main opposition party described Ikonne as a committed patriot, very brilliant academician, seasoned optometrist and excellent administrator, who gave himself to the service of his people and humanity, and for which the people of Abia State were resolved to elect him as governor.

National Chairman of PDP, Dr. Iyorchia Ayu, said the party would miss its governorship candidate in Abia State for the 2023 general election.

Ayu, in his statement issued yesterday, described Ikonne's death as a rude shock. The national chairman said the late politician was a true friend, loving father and devoted husband who valued family over everything else.

The Abia State chapter of PDP said it had also commenced mourning. Vice chairman of the party, Hon Abraham Amah, who is also the acting state publicity secretary, made this known at a press briefing where he read a statement by the ruling party.

Abia State PDP said, "His death is very painful, coming at a time when he was recuperating from illness and had shown great signs and willingness to join us in the second leg of our ward-to-ward tour that is ongoing across the 184 Wards in the 17 Local Government Areas of Abia State."

Otti also suspended all his campaign activities towards the governorship election in Abia State, owing to the death of Ikonne.

Otti, who is also mourning the death of his campaign council chairman, Chief Nnanna Ngwu, expressed sadness at the news and described the passage of Ikonne as unfortunate.

Otti recalled the last moment he had with Ikonne, where they both shared some "exciting brotherly pleasantries" at a public function, regretting that death has to snatch him away from his family and loved ones.

The LP governorship candidate said in a condolence message issued on his behalf by his media adviser, Ferdinand Ekeoma, "To Learn that Prof. Ikonne has passed on a few days after we prayed and wished him quick recovery and return to the campaign trail, is to say the least very unfortunate, but we cannot question God who decided to call him back home at this time."

Abia State governorship candidate of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Professor Greg Ibe, also expressed sadness at the death of his fellow contestant. In a statement signed by the director general of his campaign organisation, Longman Nwachukwu, Ibe said saying he received with rude shock, the unfortunate death of the PDP governorship flag bearer.

As a mark of honour to his fellow contestant, the APGA governorship hopeful announced "immediate suspension of all his political activities, including publication of campaign materials and transmission of radio and TV jingles till further notice."

PRESENTATION OF FLOW CYTOMETER TO SICKLE CELL FOUNDATION BY NNPC/CHEVRON...

L-R: Consultant, Haematologist, LUTH, Dr. Ann Ogbenna; Medical Director, Chevron, Dr. D. Obomonu; Head, Sustainability and Community Development, NNPC, Mrs. Bunmi Lawson, and National Director/CEO, Sickle Cell Foundation, Dr. Annette Akinsete, during the presentation of Flow Cytometer to the Sickle Cell Foundation Nigeria Bone Marrow Transplant Centre, LUTH, by NNPC/Chevron joint venture in Lagos… yesterday PHOTO: ABIODUN AJALA

Nigeria to Benefit from Duty Free Trade on 99% of Goods Exported to UK

Ugo Aliogo

The UK Government has launched the Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS) in Nigeria.

DCTS offers one of the most generous sets of trading preferences in the world and demonstrates the UK's commitment to building long term, mutually beneficial relationships with countries like Nigeria.

The launch took place in Lagos yesterday. The DCTS would come into force in the Spring of 2023, replacing the UK's Generalised Scheme of Preferences.

The DCTS benefits 65 countries, 37 of which are African, and will mean that Nigeria benefits from duty free trade on over 9200 products.

This would be significantly more generous than both the EU's GSP scheme and the US' AGOA scheme and, based on current trade volumes, would mean that 99 per cent of goods exports to the UK are duty free.

Speaking on the launch, UK Deputy British High Commissioner in Lagos, Ben Llewellyn-Jones said: "Nigeria is one of the UK's most important partners in Africa and the UK Government is committed to working with Nigerian businesses and exporters to boost trade between our two great nations. The UK's Developing Countries Trading Scheme harnesses the power of trade to help Nigeria and other emerging economies grow and prosper.

"One major benefit of this new UK trading scheme is that it abolishes tariffs on over 3000 everyday products that Nigeria currently exports including cocoa, cotton, plantain, flowers, fertilizers, tomatoes, frozen shrimps and sesame. The overarching aim of the new scheme is to grow free and fair trade with developing countries, boosting the economy and supporting jobs in those countries, as well as in ours."

The work was part of a wider push by the UK to drive a free trade, pro-growth agenda across the globe, using trade to drive prosperity and help eradicate poverty.

Ben Llewellyn-Jones also disclosed that the total trade volume between the United Kingdom and Nigeria was £5.5 billion in 2022.

Llewellyn-Jones also disclosed that of the £5.5 billion, total UK exports to Nigeria amounted to £3.3 billion, while total UK imports from Nigeria amounted to £2.2 billion in the four quarters of 2022. He also stated that most of the commodities traded between both countries was oil and gas. He explained that the UK was really keen on diversifying to other sectors and working with the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) in that regards.

"Through this event, we intend to try and help exporters who are considering on exports and making the UK their export destination.

"So, we hope that today's event is not simply a one off, but for many people starting their journey towards exporting to the UK or for some a real easing of that journey so that they can increase their exports and export more to the UK. But certainly, reaching to the grassroots level is exactly what we are doing," he added.

In his remarks, the Senior Commercial Agriculture Adviser, UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Simon Calvert, said the UK was cutting tariffs on 3000 new products for Nigeria, noting that whereas before Nigeria only had duty free trade on about 30 per cent of eligible goods, now the West African country has duty free trade on 9,200 products.

NSCDC Vows to End Attacks on INEC Offices

• To collaborate with other security agencies for peaceful polls in south-east

Michael Olugbode in Abuja

The Comptroller General of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), Dr. Ahmed Audi, yesterday warned against the continued attack on offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in parts of the country, vowing that that his men were ready to put an end to it.

Audi, also said the NSCDC would be evolving strategies in collaboration with other sister security agencies to ensure that the forthcoming elections would be peacefully conducted in the south-east, even as he disclosed that all men and officers of NSCDC would be deployed for the elections.

Speaking at a 2-day capacity building workshop in Abuja, for all State Commandants and Corps' strategic managers ahead of the 2023 general election, the Comptroller General of the NSCDC, said his agency would ensure that voters, domestic observers, election sensitive materials and electoral officers' safety and security were well coordinated.

Audi, who admitted that the south-east has peculiar security challenges toward next month's elections, said: "I cannot disclose strategies in the open but be rest assured that we are working with other security agencies to ensure that elections are peacefully held in the south-east."

Audi, asked the State Commandants of the NSCDC to ensure safety of INEC office in their territories, warning that his leadership won't tolerate further attacks.

He added: "We must protect INEC offices nationwide. We must give both physical support and otherwise to all the INEC offices in our care. We will not take it lightly if we hear of any attack on INEC facilities around your command again.

"With less than five weeks to the general election, the Corps will release very soon, revised standard operational guidelines on election duties, and other salient election security rules for personnel, which is aimed at ensuring safe and secured electoral processes nationwide."

Furthermore, he said: "In addition to physical security, this strategic management workshop will also develop common policy guidelines that can be used in deepening the capacity of Corps personnel, assist officers and men to comply with global standards of election security management.

"It is my earnest expectation that this workshop will further strengthen our capacity in our preparations ahead of the general elections, build our confidence as strategic commanders, while ensuring that voters, domestic observers, election sensitive materials and electoral officers' safety and security are well coordinated."

He noted that the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) has produced a revised code of conduct and rules of engagement for security personnel on electoral duty, adding that, "It is expedient that we become conversant with this updated document as strategic commanders and relate the knowledge to our respective subordinates."

The NSCDC boss lamented that the scepticism raised by Nigerians and foreign diplomats towards the successful conduct of the polls due to security concerns resulting from attacks on INEC facilities in some parts of the country as well as facilities of some sister security agencies, occasioned violence in the political rally/campaigns of certain parties, hate speeches between political gladiators, jettisoned media town hall meetings, were source of concern in recent times.

In her welcome address, the Country Representative of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), Mariga Peran, said the present fear for safety amid the rate of attacks on lives and property across the country posed significant threat to the success of the 2023 general election, compounded by several security-relevant incidents last year, such as the series of prison breaks and successful release of terrorists around the country.

Peran said the NSCDC plays a vital role among the security agencies engaged with securing the election, hence the training.

She said: "With a good reputation among the citizens, NSCDC enjoys public confidence like hardly any other security agency in Nigeria.

"Not only is the NSCDC committed to advance their skill sets and deliver quality services constantly, you also understand the importance of inter-agency collaboration for the greater good of Nigeria."

The KAS Country Representative said, "there is need to identify security lapses, hence enabling personnel of security agencies to strengthen their skills and operations for the good electoral conduct, investigation, arrest and prosecution of offenders."

Atiku Appoints Ex-NHIS Boss, Yusuf Special Adviser

Former vice president and presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar has appointed Prof. Usman Yusuf as Special Adviser on Community Engagement to the Atiku, Okowa Presidential Campaigns.

In a letter, personally signed by the PDP presidential candidate, Atiku charged Yusuf to use his vast experiences and contacts to effectively discharge the responsibilities of his office.

The professor by the appointment was charged to provide Advisory services on community engagement related issues by identifying community-based organisations (C30s) for necessary interface with local communities, organising creative programs and events regularly with relevant stakeholders of the local community with the goal of galvanising support for the PDP candidate and ensuring victory in the election.

"He is also charged to build strong relationships with local community leaders, community-based organisations, gender and various age groups in the grassroots for the propagation of Atiku's plans and ideas so as to ensure acceptability and necessary support in the local communities," a statement explained.

Yusuf was the former Executive Secretary of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS).

The Professor of haematology-oncology and bone marrow transplantation and an alumnus of Ahmadu Bello University had in a recent interview opined that it would be difficult for the All Progressives Congress presidential candidate, Bola Tinubu to campaign in the southeast. He had written several articles in support of the candidate of the PDP, Atiku Abubakar and has been generally seen as a strong supporter of the PDP candidate.

Cholera Outbreak: 2,874 Bauchi Residents Hospitalised in 2022, NGO Reveals

Segun Awofadeji in Bauchi

No fewer than 2,874 persons were hospitalised due to cholera in Bauchi State last year 2022.

A non-governmental organisation (NGO), known as Women Development Association for Self Sustenance (WODASS), made the disclosure at a meeting of Bauchi State Emirate Council on Health yesterday.

The Programme Manager of the NGO, Mr. Sukumun Ezekiel, who presented a document during the meeting said the affected persons were hospitalised as a result of frequent

cholera outbreak.

Sukumun who said the disease killed 42 persons, added that out of the 2,874 that were hospitalised, Bauchi Local Government Area (LGA) had the highest number of casualties with about 77 per cent of the cases, representing 2,185 people.

He said Toro LGA recorded 212 cholera cases within the period while Dass and Tafawa local government areas had about 100 cases each.

According to the NGO, except Bogoro, 19 local government areas out of Bauchi's 20 LGAS recorded confirmed cholera cases in 2021.

Sukumun who stated that Cholera had been on the rise nationwide since the beginning of the year, with 74 deaths reported so far by NCDC, disclosed that children below five years were the most affected by the life-threatening disease.

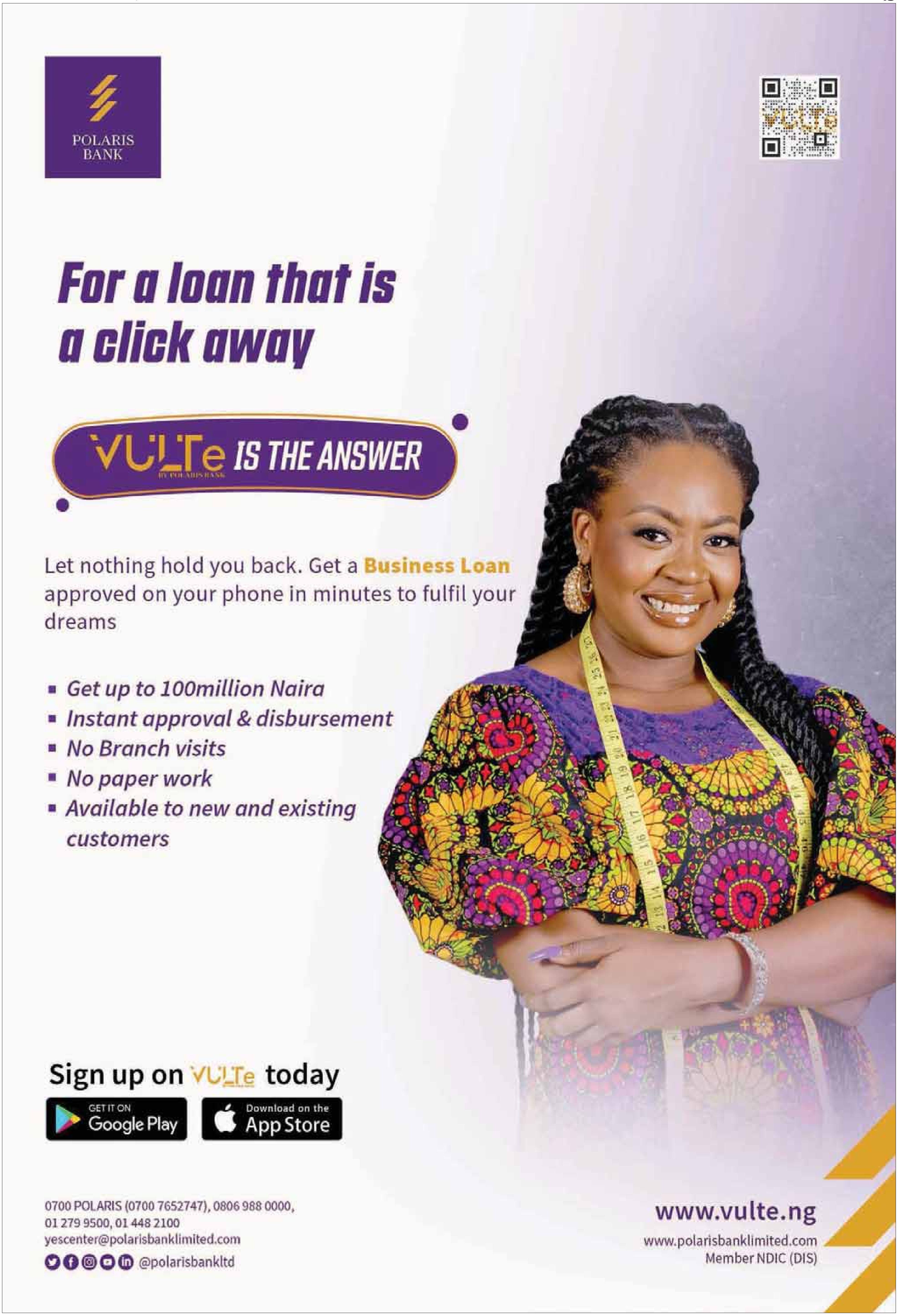
He pointed out that beyond health implications, cholera also has socio- economic impact, including affecting productivity, work-related activities and income/finances.

In order to curb cholera outbreak, the NGO called for improved hygiene. Sukumun further explained that the hygiene education should focus on key behaviors such as respiratory hygiene, hand washing, physical distancing, safe excreta disposal, water storage and COVID-19 vaccine uptake.

He also called for routine provision of sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene interventions in communities and LGAs with poor access, especially those with endemic trends.

According to the WODASS, such facilities should be provided in schools, healthcare centers and public places to support inclusive access to WASH for all.

WODASS which is partnering with WaterAid Nigeria also wants governments to scale-up WaterAid's Clean Family Campaign to all local government areas across the three senatorial zones of Bauchi and ensure that personal and environmental hygiene were at the core of immediate response plans.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POLITICS

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Obhakhan: Najatu's Defection Won't Stop APC from Winning Presidential Poll

Secretary of Public Affairs Directorate of the Presidential Campaign Council of the All Progressives Congress, Gideon Obhakhan, in this interview bares his mind on many issues including the recent defection of a member of the APC Campaign Council, Najatu Mohammed, saying her defection won't stop the ruling party from being victorious at the presidential poll. **Adedayo Akinwale** brings excerpts:

The campaign has lasted almost four months, as a member of the Presidential Campaign Council, how would you rate the campaign?

So far, it's been very good. It is easy to sell a candidate that has a good past. With the development that Tinubu brought to Lagos, selling him has not been a problem for us. And we have been comparing ourselves with other candidates from other political parties. And most of the campaigns we have have shown what we are going to do. So in terms of general assessment of how far we have done, it has been very good. We're getting more and more acceptability, some of the grey areas that people had concerns about, we have been able to clear that.

If you look at how we have gone through the number of states we have campaigned, the acceptability is there, the acceptance is there. People are beginning to get more details about the party, more details about the candidate.

So there hasn't been any form of violence, which is also very good. People are in the field articulating issues and talking about what APC possess for Nigeria and what we have done before. It's positive up to this point.

One of the major issues against your candidate was this issue of his personality, his businesses and his growing up. How well could you say you've been able to deal with that to convince Nigeria that it is not going to be an issue when the election comes?

Okay, well, the main things they've been talking about have always been issues about age, issues about health. But when you look at the number of times we have answered it, you will know that it is just the antics of the opposition to try to drum the lies they have to make it look like it's true.

Obhakhan

You know if you say somebody is not fit, are you a medical doctor? Do we have a medical report that shows him not to be fit. Tinubu is the frontrunner in this election. He has campaigned in most states than every other candidate today. Generally speaking, if you say somebody is sick, how would that person be able to meet up with the daily schedule, going from state to state without rest? And it's not that it just goes to campaign or goes to sleep, he still goes around attending town hall meetings, meeting with stakeholders.

So the issue of health is just one cliche that people have held onto especially, the opposition, who don't have anything to campaign with and they want to continue to repeat it with the hope that when they continue to repeat a lie, it will eventually become the truth. It just shows the emptiness in the programs they have because they don't have anything to sell.

They will rather go tarnishing the image of the front runner in this election. Another one is about education, I think it is in the public domain where some of these so-called social media influencers had to travel all the way to the United States.

And the guy came back to say he wasted $4,000 trying to prove that he did not go to school, that he was proven wrong because he got the details from Chicago State University that Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu attended university.

So if somebody comes tomorrow and keeps talking about educational background, we tend to ignore because it's a distraction, which we're not ready to be part of.

So in terms of personality, I don't know what can be more than the track record that he has behind him in Lagos to prove that his personality is okay. Lagos was like a slum when he took over and he turned it around, and today, it's s the fifth largest economy in Africa. So issues of personality are distractions which we are not ready to hammer on. But I can tell you that Tinubu is fit, he's educated and his integrity is intact and he's ready to take Nigeria to the next level.

A former member of APC Campaign Council, Najatu Mohammed , has said the APC presidential candidate suffers from dementia. Are you not worried about that?

First and foremost, let me say that the last time I checked, Najatu Mohammed was a graduate of history and not a medical doctor.

So when a historian starts to talk about somebody's health, and people take it seriously, then I just get concerned.

First, how do you judge a human being by just looking at him and then you know, this person has X Y ailment. So I think those are conjectures.

And if you look at her follow up comments, you can deduce the reasons why she is behaving the way she's behaving.

Okay, let's just take our mind back to when she became part of this project. I'm quoting from her account, she was an ardent supporter of Muhammadu Buhari, prior to the election in 2015. From 2015 till date, if my calculation is right, it is about eight years. So it took you eight years to find out that the person you're supporting is not doing well. That smacks of mischief.

Now you were a member of the campaign Council. The campaign Council was set up sometime in October 2022. It took you four months to know that the candidates you're supporting is not well and therefore you have to resign. Again, that too smells of mischief.

The question is, what was she asking for that she didn't get? And just this morning on television, she complained about how they were not inviting her to join the campaign trail, that is a contradiction on its own.

NOTE: Interested readers should continue in the online edition on www.thisdaylive.com

Umeh: I'm Returning to Senate for Good Governance and Making of Good Laws

Labour Party's candidate for Anambra Central Senatorial Zone, Chief Victor Umeh, in this interview with David-Chyddy Eleke says he is seeking re-election to the Red Chamber to ensure justice for all Nigerians and to make good laws for the governance of Nigeria, among other issues.

Anambra State government recently removed your billboards when those of other candidates in the state are still standing. What problem do you have with the state government?

We have no problem with Anambra State government, what we are seeing is pure politics. You would have seen around Anambra State that they say Anambra is APGA land, and being APGA land, no other party should operate here.

We are surprised at the turn of events. The billboards which were brought down on Saturday had been there since December and we have no issues at all. The pedestrian bridge across Unizik Junction has a site that is managed by an advertising agency called SMIC Advertising International Limited, registered by Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON).

They have been managing that site, renting out to clients. The last people that were there were Interfact Brewery, makers of Hero Beer.

In December it became vacant and the CEO of the company called me and offered the site to me that it is available. We discussed and agreed and I paid him immediately and the flexes were produced and put there. It has been there until last Saturday when the posters and flexes were removed by Anambra State government.

We were shocked that the governor was able to do that. A week earlier, in a meeting of members of his (Governor's) party at the Governor's Lodge, he threatened that he would remove them, that they were too prominent, and that this state belonged to APGA, and only APGA should be there. Some people told him the place must be under contract and he said he didn't care. He was also told money has been paid for it, and he said the money should be refunded. Immediately after the meeting, more than five people called and told me. I am surprised because this is a contract. I paid N1milion, N500,000 for either sides.

Umeh

Hours after he removed it, he replaced my flexes with APGA billboard. Anambra is APGA land; that is the advertisement he put there. This confirmed what he said that APGA owned Anambra and no other person should do anything to upstage APGA.

First of all, the pedestrian bridge is a not property of the Anambra State government in any way. It belongs to the federal government. Peter Obi constructed it, and the state was refunded money for it. I was in the senate when that refund was made. Anambra was refunded N37billion for federal roads constructed by Obi, and that included the pedestrian bridge too.

So, that asset is not that of the Anambra State government. What he has done is very shocking, that someone of his status cannot respect a simple valid contract. The advertising agency is also helpless, but I have told them not to stop at that because this is a contract. When I was negotiating for the site, he told me to pay that much because he will pay signage fee to Anambra State government.

Will you go to court?

Of course, my right has been infringed upon, but you also have to consider a lot of things; the election is just six weeks away. He knew he was wrong, but he knows that if I go to court, he would say, "we will be in court for six years." I have heard him say such things. So I will be wasting my time. I am waiting for the advert agency to get back to me, they are the ones dealing directly with the state government. I am only a third party in the business.

There had been an initial announcement about monies that politicians will pay to be able to campaign in Anambra. N10million, N7million, N5million, N2million for presidential, senatorial, House of Representatives and House of Assembly candidates respectively? Did you pay or negotiate?

That is what they are relying on to deceive the public. I saw his commissioner for special duties, a lawyer, saying incoherent things in defence. He knows that they do not have the powers to make such laws. The governor is only being driven by desperation to make revenue.

Let me tell you, elections and issues relating to them are regulated by INEC, including campaigns. It is not within the purview of state governments to regulate campaigns of political parties and their candidates in any election.

If a party nominates a candidate and forwards the name to INEC, nobody is allowed to do anything to hinder the candidate from campaigning and to seek for votes. They campaign as they deem fit.

If they want to use outdoor advertising, there are agencies that can do it for you. The state government said you must pay campaign fees if you want to campaign in Anambra. I laughed at them. This place is a place where people do not play by the rules. It's only in Anambra State that a state imposes humongous fees on candidates. What they are saying is that if you are a valid candidate and you do not have money to pay state government, you will not campaign. This is illegal. Once candidates are elected and their names forwarded, they should be allowed to campaign unhindered. Such thing is not in the electoral act. That is why to file a candidate to INEC is free.

NOTE: Interested readers should continue in the online edition on www.thisdaylive.com

Tegbe: I Support G-5 Governors' Ideological Position on Marginalisation

Peoples Democratic Party's Senatorial Candidate for Oyo South, Mogaji Olasunkanmi Tegbe, in this interview with **Kemi Olaitan** expresses his support for the Ideological Position of the G-5 Governors of the Peoples Democratic Party on marginalisation and his defection from the All Progressives Congress to PDP, among other issues.

You came from the blues and got Oyo South senatorial ticket of PDP, how did it happen?

Before I got to PDP, I was being talked to by various people and I said I was not interested.

In fact, I wanted to just quit and do my private business. But, I was asked to join PDP, and I asked what is in it for me. I was told that there is an opportunity for me to become the party's senatorial candidate. This same opportunity was offered to me in 2018. After I stepped down after APC primaries, Seyi Makinde saw me and asked if the PDP can offer me the same Oyo South senatorial district and I said in 2018, Governor Abiola Ajimobi, my mentor, wanted to be senator in that same area, I would not go and face him, it is a matter of respect and I won't do it for anybody. I have people contesting against me today that were my people. But, then, in 2018, I said, I would not. How can I go and compete against Governor Ajimobi? Politics is not do or die for me.

When I got into PDP, it was already clear that the ticket would not be given to my briother, Senator Kola Balogun. There were other people that were being considered and one of them was Dr. Nureni Adeniran. He was the one that offered to step down for me. He said, 'if it was Tegbe, I will step down for him' And publicly, he stepped down for me, that Tegbe deserves this ticket.

It was in the news that he even collapsed his political structure for me. I won't be part of any shady dealing; I am not desperate. By God's grace, I will win the election; then you will see a committed man.

In 2019 you were a governorship aspirant, why Senate four years down the line?

Tegbe

I looked at everything and told myself, you can't keep fighting from outside. If I keep staying in the private sector and keep shooting at governorship, I am seen as an outsider, let me shoot at Senate and work with a person like Governor Seyi Makinde and let us make a change. As a Senator, I have a duty to sponsor legislations and bills that will promote development in the country, more importantly, for my senatorial district and for Oyo State; but, beyond that, also attract development into Oyo State through multilateral, bilateral agencies or from the Federal Government and you do that in conjunction with the governor, it makes life easy. As senator, I want to focus on issues of federalism, human capital development, education, health and technology.

Why did you dump the All Progressives Congress (APC) for PDP?

I was in APC until all the charade of congress, result being modified. We did ward congress, results were changed; we did local government congress, results were changed. At that point, I said, all my life, I have been trained in an environment of ethical values and I know everything you build on wrong foundation will always fail. So, why do I want to belong to somewhere where all the results are being falsified? So, I decided to exit APC.

Sometimes, we can trivialise things that we did not experience. If you go through a process where you sat for an exam, you were sure you did well in the exam, result came out and you came first, you scored 97 percent and you are qualified for scholarship, they said they will forward the result to the headquarters. Then, Abuja announces a result and you see your score and instead of 97percent, you see 37 percent, and you see people that you know who did not score up to 50. It was so bad as my ward executives were changed. We did local government congress; the results was changed, and it was submitted. But in Abuja, it was a different thing.

But, I have moved on. If somebody changes your score, and you go to the principal and the principal says sorry, there is nothing he can do about it, are you going to bother to do the next examination in that school? This is because it is a waste of time.

Weeks after I left, people started leaving APC. In deciding to leave APC, an option was for me to go back to my practice; another option is for me to look for another party; the third option was for me to start a new party. You know how expensive it is to start a new party. People said I should not go back to my work; we have invested so much in politics; we want to change governance; we wanted to change the environment.

Then I looked around and I said if I really want to join an existing party, the only party that made sense to me was the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The two reasons it made sense to me were: first, it is an existing strong platform; second, I said since I am going to shelve my gubernatorial ambition, who are the likely gubernatorial candidates I would work with.

We had predicted that Teslim Folarin will get the APC ticket after all the 'Jagba'; then we had Seyi Makinde in PDP; and Bayo Adelabu, who will want to contest by all means. Out of the three, I said it is only Seyi Makinde that I could really relate with and that was why I went to PDP.

How did your path cross that of late Governor Abiola Ajimobi?

My path crossed with the late Governor Abiola Ajimobi in 2010. Somebody called me and said somebody wanted to be governor of Oyo State and I had said he should talk to you that you have worked with many governments across the world and you will be able to draw his roadmap, and we met.

I spent three months with my team, free of charge, to put together the roadmap for Oyo State. In three months, my team travelled all over Oyo state, at our own cost.

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Nkom: FG is Committed to Revenue Generation Drive in Mining Sector

Director General of the Nigeria Mining Cadastral Office, Obadiah Nkom, in this interview explains the role of the agency to reposition the nation's mining sector with a view to increasing revenue generation and job creation. Lawrence Olaoye was there. **Deji Elumoye** brings excerpts:

Presidential candidate of New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP), Dr Rabiu Kwakwanso recently spoke at the Chattam House, London where he linked the security crises in the North West to mineral struggles, Being a licence issuing agency, what roles are you playing in managing these crises?

I beg to respond but whatever we are doing, they are responsibilities and I think the Minister will be in a better position to speak on those policy matters.

Like how much have you been able to generate into the government coffers since your appointment?

The agency generated N14.59 billion between 2018 and 2022 from the issuance of mining licences. in 2018, 2019 and 2020, we generated N1.55 billion, N2.38 billion and N2.57 billion respectively. However, between 2021 and 2022, the agency's revenue fell from N4.3 billion to N3.79 billion respectively. The drop in revenues was due to changes in its internal operating system which temporarily affected our revenue inflows.

Revenue Generation is key because we have had to be able to ensure that we improve on it. We had 86 percent increase in revenue from 2001. But I can tell you that with the new system, without mincing words that subsequently we are going to have a steady increase.

In our revenue generation, it is nothing, but application fees, processing fees and the annual service fee.

We are not in charge of other activities like payment of royalties and so on. So, even with these little aspects of revenue components we still want to ensure that at the end of the day our revenue increase and we are able to add to the development of Nigeria and increase the

Nkom

wellbeing of citizens, particularly the key components of job creation and revenue, based on our vision for the country.

The Cadastre has of recent witnessed an increase in the number of applications for mining permits, due to the transparent nature of the process. Among our key accomplishments, is the more you are transparent, the more you will be able to see people coming in to submit application. So we have quite an increase in that regard and the increase is not just nationally. You have foreign investors getting attracted by way of our transparency, our policies and the way things are being done.

We have also opened zonal offices, which has taken it closer to the people and the intent of the agency is to be able to ensure that we reduce the number of illegal or informal miners so that at the end of the day, we make licencing easier for them.

Despite the transparent and open process in your agency, we continue to see revenue loss to the government due to illegal mining and devastation of the sites. How is your agency dealing with those who compromise your transparent open system?

The question is tied to huge revenue loss. I am in charge of Rights and there are some other departments under the ministry in charge of illegal mining; in charge of making sure that they eradicate illegal mining. My mandate stops at the issuance of licences and they take over. But the ministry is there where you can ask those questions. I talk about revenue loss in terms of titles.

Between September 2021 and September 2022, your agency revoked over 3,400 tittles of miners across the country. How do you balance revocation of titles and your efforts to increase revenues?

Some will say that people were issued licences and they put it in their drawers; others are saying that if we are looking for revenue how do we balance revoking licences from those people? Our primary concern is to ensure that the rightful people are holding those licences and that is why we have the principle, which is international, 'you use it or lose it'.

We give you the licence, if you don't use it, we revoke it. Go to the provision of the Act, the primary aim of government was to be able to ensure that we develop the sector. There are other big companies that come and you find out that some of these pockets of areas that are rich, some are holding those tittles and not doing anything for one reason or the other.

So we ensure that we implement the angle of use it or lose it. As long as we are having revenue at the back of our mind, our priority is the development of the sector.

What is the level of collaboration between your agency and state government towards the needed enlightenment to those involved in mining activities as a way of reducing illegal mining in the country?

We collaborate closely whereby we have mineral resources committees which are established in the states and the chair of that committee is a nominee from the state. The essence of the committee is to advise the minister on mining matters periodically.

Apart from that we have quite a number of state government that have Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV) that are arms of investments for governments. There are many of the states that have those companies as their investment arms to be able to compete favourably and be the driving force to the investments in their states.

Recently, we saw activists were protesting against coal mining in Germany, the reason for the protest was different from what we saw when coal was a major revenue earners in Nigeria. Are you considering these issues in issuing licences for coal miners in Nigeria?

On the issue of Coal, I think it is very clear that the coal aspect and other minerals and energy, coal to power project, in this country, so there are restrictions and conditionalities for the issuance of licences unlike what used to happen before.

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FEATURES

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Upending the Media, Creative Industry to Boost Innovation

For decades, the media and creative industries have been the exclusive preserve of legacy institutions and moguls. Still, SBI Media Workshop, founded by Rotimi Bankole, has, for the last three years, sought to upend the system by providing free industry training that could help young Nigerians succeed in the industry. Writes **Mary Nnah**

Panelist at the SIB Media Workshop

Participants at the event SBI-Media

In a world of ever-evolving changes and innovations heralded by digital technology, businesses and entrepreneurs face intense pressure to remain relevant and thrive. Democratisation, ease of entry, and scalable opportunities are a few benefits that digital technology has brought to one sector in particular.

It is on these distinct advantages that SBI Media Workshop has been building its mission.

As the third edition of the SBI Media Workshop was concluded in Lagos on December 3, 2022, the initiator of the Media Workshop, Rotimi Bankole, expressed optimism that the workshop is "now several steps closer to its original goal."

He said, "The key differentiator for SBI Media Workshop has always been as a credible transfer of skills to young Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35. We didn't intend to stage a series of events where people would only talk and move on; we wanted to empower young Nigerians with real, monetizable skills, particularly in one of the fastest-growing industries in Nigeria, and one we are institutionally familiar with — media. If you looked around, you would confirm that there is indeed no other programme like SBI Media Workshop."

With up to 23 million unemployed people in Nigeria, according to a report in 2022 by Jobberman in collaboration with Young Africa Works and Mastercard Foundation, and pay growth still failing to keep up with the soaring inflation, SBI Media Workshop's effort appears as timely as it is crucial.

Compounding this problem is a very clear digital skills gap, and it has been identified that the lack of digital skills is hindering many young people from identifying and engaging in opportunities that will be beneficial to them.

For any sector looking to bolster employment and economic opportunities, the first step is to ensure that there are training, support and opportunities to offer the most attractive careers and enabling environment for large and small businesses to thrive.

Rotimi Bankole, founder SBI Media Workshop and CEO, SBI Stagwell

Tech content creator Fisayo Fosudo delivers keynote at third edition of SBI Media Workshop in Lagos

Bankole's SBI Media Workshop adopts the model where it connects participants with experts who engage, teach and mentor, but also provides support and opportunities by way of grants, funding, technology, strategic positioning and growth network to the participants.

"SBI Media Workshop is completely designed to create more media entrepreneurs. When the market grows, especially by injecting as many innovative ideas as possible into it, it is to the benefit of everyone," Bankole said.

Data released by the Workshop team show that so far, nearly 1,000 people have attended the events in person and over 1 million have either participated online or seen clips from the sessions. Nearly 30 people have also received grants to help kick-start their media enterprises since 2020; and key industry supporters in such as Sony, Turkish Airlines, Green Africa, Radisson Hotels, Binance, and Showmax have also become partners. The "overarching objective of SMW is to become the catalyst for economic empowerment of more than two million young Nigerians in the next five years," noted Bankole. "We're getting quite close to that target."

Part of what has made SBI Media Workshop noteworthy is the cadre of facilitators it offers every year. The organisers have said before one could be a facilitator at SBI Media Workshop, one must be an active and accomplished practitioner in the field of media, tech, or a combination of both. "We only want to share cutting-edge thinking and methods with SBI Media Workshop participants, hence, we must be rigorous in our search for the kinds of imaginative and articulate experts who can join us in delivering exceptional value to the participants," Bankole stressed.

He added that sophisticated concepts, trends and opportunities must be explained in clear terms to the audience, most of whom are hearing them for the first time. "Messages must stand out. Quotes must sparkle. Statistics must tell a big-picture story. Our workshop goes deep into developing and delivering truly engaging and memorable experiences for the participants. It helps them to adopt the skills passed on by the facilitators who are always carefully selected from top levels of their various fields," said Bankole.

So far, SBI Media Workshop has had facilitators such as the award-winning filmmaker Kunle Afolayan, top tech YouTuber Fisayo Fosudo, one of the best-known social media video directors Edem Victor, music video director Unlimited LA, Boomplay General Manager Dele Kadiri, and executive committee member of Nigerian Bar Association, Tolulope Aderemi.

Others who have spoken at SMW include Opeyemi Awoyemi, cofounder of Fast Forward Venture Studio, the job listing site Jobberman, and native Nigerian WebHost company Whogohost; Nsikan Benjamin, a senior executive at Binance West Africa; Emmanuel Ebanehita, a top executive at Binance Africa; Chris Ani, CEO, Digital Abundance Holdings Limited; and Ugochukwu Obi, partner at Perchstone & Graeys.

While striving to provide this high quality of experience to participants is admirable, it can also be costly and time-consuming. It requires additional resources and effort to ensure that every touchpoint is smooth and seamless for participants. This can include creating detailed programs and modules, updating the application process to make it more user-friendly and accessible to a vast number of people, providing thorough onboarding materials and training, and offering ongoing support and development opportunities beyond the workshop.

While it may require a significant investment of time and resources to put together, Bankole affirms that the investment is worth the returns in the long run.

"As SBI Media Workshop trains more entrepreneurs, it also helps to create more value for the market. Some of this value may, for instance, attract foreign investments or earn payments in foreign currencies. This is just one way, and I believe the value that SBI Media Workshop delivers will compound over time", Bankole noted further.

Oluwabusuyi Fakanlu: Making a Difference in the Construction Industry

Mary Nnah

Nigeria is without doubt, one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa with the construction industry being a major contributor to this growth, creating massive employment opportunities.

The industry has produced several professionals with credible records to show despite several economic challenges.

One such professional that has proven his mettle in the industry through hard work and continuous impact is Architect Oluwabusuyi Adonis Fakanlu.

Fakanlu is the amiable Chief Executive officer of Comfort Architectural Finishing Limited, a brand he started 13 years ago after about six years of paid employment.

Oluwabusuyi Fakanlu

He is a 2022 official member of the prestigious Forbes Business Council and an alumnus of Lagos Business School. A Project Management Expert who cut his teeth at the Albert and Benjamin Ross Project Management Institute Lagos with a foundation degree from Oscotech.

He is also an associate member of the American Institute of Architects and an Affiliate of the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists, UK.

Fakanlu who said his journey into the construction industry has been an interesting one but not without its attending challenges, revealed further that his industry experience cuts across architectural technology, building and civil construction, real estate development as well as project management.

Speaking on his organisation's unique proposition, the construction expert said

"What makes CAF Limited unique is the value we place on quality project delivery, diligence, promptness in delivery, innovation, cost-effectiveness, and client service among others.

"They are what have helped us over the years. When you patronise us, we are not just building or selling you a house, we are giving you a lifetime of comfort and peace of mind.

"Our organisation has consistently delivered on our promises to our numerous clients ranging from individuals, corporate organisations, religious institutions and government establishments. We have successfully executed over 200 building and civil construction projects and still counting", he noted.

Speaking on some of Comfort Architectural Finishing's offerings, Fakanlu said, "As an emerging Building and Civil Construction company specializing in Building and Civil Construction, Real Estate Development and Project management. We offer integrated construction solutions and related services.

"Our core competencies cover all project phases, including planning, design, engineering, construction, maintenance, and operation, for building, infrastructure, and industrial projects. "

He said further that the Nigerian construction industry has outgrown most other sectors of the local economy over the last few years and experts have opined that the industry is expected to maintain continuous growth from 2020-2030.

Although the industry has not been able to fully maximise its potential because its contribution to the Nigerian GDP and employment of labour is still low it is expected to rise because of the recent focus of the Federal Government on investments in infrastructural developments.

He expressed optimism that with the right political and economic environment, the sector will attract foreign investors with the attendant benefit of AN increase in construction activities, says the award-winning entrepreneur.

The Architectural Technologist did not fail to mention a few challenges he encountered in his business journey, such as raising start-up capital building clients' confidence and trust, getting the right and competent staff, and high cost of financing projects among others.

His advice to business owners in Nigeria: "You just have to keep putting in the work, there are no shortcuts to success in life and business, do unto others as you want to be done to you and always strive to be

HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

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Raising Public Health Standard with Fortified Food

Given the importance of fortified food, **Precious Ugwuzor** reports that Olam Agri is raising public health standard with 1 trillion servings

Ashish Pande

It is estimated that three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet annually. This unhealthy population is expected to rise by 267.6 million due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hence, reaching people with micronutrients such as Vitamin A, iron, zinc, iodine, and folate on a global scale is seen as strategic to halting the unfavourable rise in unhealthy diets.

To fill the lacuna, Olam Agri has said it is committed to helping to raise the standard of public health as it contributes to meeting the growing demand for healthy foods across the African continent and beyond.

Speaking at the recently concluded World Economic Forum (WEF), Ashish Pande, Senior Vice President, Olam Agri, said Olam Agri will deliver 1 trillion servings of fortified food - wheat flour, edible oil, rice – to provide essential micronutrients to over 250 million people each day by 2030.

"Food fortification is at the core of Olam Agri's purpose of transforming food, feed, and fibre for a sustainable future. In 2021, we produced more than 83 billion servings of fortified foods for consumers in Africa, which included fortified rice in Ghana and Cameroon.

" Our commitment goes beyond meeting regulatory requirements to addressing the important nutrient gaps faced by millions of people. By 2030, we pledge to deliver 1 trillion servings of fortified food - wheat flour, edible oil, rice to provide essential micronutrients to over 250 million people each day," Pande said.

Global food fortification actions are coming under sharp scrutiny. A discourse around the fortification of staple foods such as rice and wheat, and how to build a consensus around unified strategies suitable for reducing malnutrition on a global scale garnered attention at the recently concluded WEF 2023 in Davos, Switzerland.

WEF gathers global leaders and key decision-makers across the globe annually to initiate dialogue and drive cooperation that will help navigate the pressing challenges impacting the health of the global economy.

This year, the forum mobilized food processors, partner governments, technical agencies, and key donors to address nutrition issues, as well as deepen collaboration and partnership in providing solutions to the issues.

Pande underlines the need for and advantages of partnerships between millers and technical partners to help address unhealthy diets.

"Thanks to our partnership with TechnoServe, we have installed premix facilities across our local food manufacturing facilities. The premix facility is automated, and the process is controlled to ensure the persistence of quality premix and consistent supply of nourishing foods across our operating markets," Pande said.

Diving into the barriers and solutions to scale fortification initiatives on the globe, Paul Newnham, the Vice Chair of the Food System Champion Network, and moderator at the WEF session, said, "Millers are a powerful new ally in the global fight against malnutrition. One in two children and two in three women face at least one micronutrient deficiency.

"Fortification has a critical role to play. From consumer education to regulatory frameworks, millers face key barriers in producing fortified foods. Millers need to be put on a level playing field, with equal partnerships between business and millers."

To round off the discourse on food fortification at the forum, a formidable initiative tagged 'Miller 4 Nutrition Global Coalition' was launched. According to Newnham, the initiative aims to gather millers of all sizes and diverse actors to improve nutrition worldwide.

The World Economic Forum Food Systems Initiative stimulates multi-sectoral leadership to support collective regional and country-led action, and advancing global insight and policy, to accelerate food systems transformations aimed at finding solutions to malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and hunger.

Olam Agri is a leading agribusiness, transforming food, feed and fibre with a global origination footprint, processing capabilities and deep understanding of market needs built over 33 years.

With a strong presence in high-growth emerging markets and products across grains & oilseeds, animal feed & protein, rice, edible oils, specialty grains & seeds, cotton, wood products, rubber and commodity financial services, Olam Agri is at the heart of global food and agri-trade flows with more than 40 million MT in volume traded annually.

Focused on transforming food, feed, and fibre for a more sustainable future, it aims at creating value for customers, enable farming communities to prosper sustainably and strive for a food-secure future.

Nigeria at the Finish Line of Eliminating Transfats - NAFDAC

The National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has said that Nigeria is already at the finish line when it comes to the elimination of trans fat in Nigeria's food supply chain.

The agency made this known at the launch of the 4th 'Countdown to 2023' report by the World Health Organization (WHO). The report is an annual compilation of progress made on the global stage in the fight against trans-fat since the global call was made in 2018.

Dr Eva Edwards, NAFDAC's Director, Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (FSAN) who was a panelist at the launch informed the global audience that 'the scope of Nigeria's regulations to eliminate trans-fat covers edible Fats and Oils and food containing fats and oils.'

'The regulation also has a complimentary regulation on prepackaged food labelling which are all in the final stages and waiting for approval', she said. Trans fat is unhealthy fat that increases the bad cholesterol and decreases the good cholesterol. Trans fats occur in two states; the natural form (or ruminant trans-fat) which is found in meat and dairy products. They form naturally when bacteria in animals' stomachs digest grass. They have no impact on health, so they are of no cause for concern.

The WHO noted that 'Industrially produced trans fats are contained in hardened vegetable fats, such as margarine and ghee, and are often present in snack food, baked foods, and fried foods. Manufacturers often use them as they have a longer shelf life than other fats.'

With only 11 months left on the calendar for action, the WHO noted that everyone has a role to play in the elimination of trans fat in the global food supply chain. The Director General of the WHO, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus noted that there are three (3) specific asks for the next phase which include 'government of countries around the world taking urgent action to implement best practices in their countries, collaboration of food manufacturers, and more work from Civil Society Organisations to advocate more and keep governments on their toes.'

Similarly, Dr. Tom Frieden, President of Resolve to Save Lives, said that 'It's not a time for more studies, it is a time for action' as he reeled out dangers of trans fat consumption and why it has no place in our food system.

With more than 20 countries passing best practices regulation on trans-fat elimination, Nigeria, a country with a strategic role on the continent cannot afford to let her chance to save Nigerians from preventable deaths slide on the slaughtering slab of bureaucracy.

Prioritising Health Over Profit through SSB Tax

Chidebere Enisire

It is easy to consume large quantity of sugary drinks because of their availability, affordability, and sizes. Sugar Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) are beverages that contain added sugars, including sodas, sports drinks, sweet teas, fruit drinks, energy drinks, and some fruit juices. Excessive consumption of SSBs has been linked to a wide range of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and over 12 types of cancer, tooth decay, cavities, gout, and arthritis, among others.

One of the most effective tools for reducing obesity rates and other NCDs is the implementation of taxes to increase the final retail price of products containing SSBs by at least 20%, as the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended. The need for SSB tax stems from the fact that they have little or no nutritional value. Instead, their consumption has contributed to an increase in the global burden of NCDs, contributing significantly to the aforementioned illnesses.

Beyond health impact on consumers, the consumption of SSBs result in economic burdens derived from healthcare expenditure, low productivity, permanent disability, and premature deaths. These also impede economic growth.

In Nigeria, Cardiovascular Diseases (CVDs) remain the leading cause of death and a significant cause of illness and disability. Sadly, Nigeria has the highest prevalence of CVDs in the continent, with more than 11 million Nigerians living with diabetes.

The growing evidence that consuming sugary drinks can lead to a range of health problems motivated the Federal Government to introduce taxes on sugar-sweetened carbonated drinks in 2021. Through this initiative, the government aims to discourage people from excessively consuming them and to raise revenue for public health programs.

By this action, Nigeria is emulating other nations who know that by making these products more expensive, the demand for them will decline and people will naturally opt for healthier and cheaper options. This can help to improve public health and reduce the burden on healthcare systems.

Several research suggests that the cause of death, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, has shifted from infectious diseases to NCDs due to the prevalence of overweight and obesity.

It is for this reason that the Nigerian government must remain determined in increasing the tax on SSBs despite the unpopular argument by the soft drinks industry that taxation would lead to their closing shops.

The WHO guidelines recommend that to prevent obesity and tooth decay, adults and children reduce their consumption of free sugars to less than 10% of their daily energy intake (equivalent to around 12 teaspoons of table sugar for adults). The guidelines suggest further reducing the intake of sugars to below 5% of daily energy intake (about six teaspoons of table sugar for adults) for additional health benefits.

Several arguments have been advanced against these SSB taxes, suggesting that they are not effective, are regressive, negatively affect employment and economic growth, and violate international, regional, and national law. However, concrete evidence from over 40 countries implementing these taxes proves otherwise.

The soft drink industry is usually behind such misinformation and is targeted ultimately at either weakening or killing regulation. They devise different tactics to increase sales, regardless of the health of the uninformed consumers or the amount of money the government spends to manage the prevalence of NCDs. There have been cases when, rather than reduce sugar in their products, the producers of such products reduce the bottle sizes of their brands.

It is important to note that consumers have a right to good and healthy products. Public health should be prioritized over profit, industry actors should be compelled to accept the reality, which is that the SSB tax is a way to reduce the burden of NCDs that are fast increasing nationally.

There is a saying that "A healthy body is a healthy mind". This phrase must readily come to mind when the temptation to consume sugary drinks comes. With healthy bodies, we can take on the new year in good state of well-being and can be rest assured about productivity.

Africa Medical Centre to Make Nigeria Medical Tourism Destination, Says Dabiri-Erewa

Rebecca Ejifoma

The Chairman/CEO of Nigerians in the Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), Mrs Abike Dabiri-Erewa, has said that the establishment of the Africa Medical Centre for Excellence (AMCE) would make Nigeria a destination for medical tourism.

She noted this in Abuja while receiving the CEO of AMCE, Mr Brian Deaver, and his team on a courtesy call.

Dabiri-Erewa added that the number of medical facilities planned for the centre would go a long way to not only reduce the brain drain of medical professionals but also be a game changer in medical tourism.

With the establishment of AMCE, she believes that the nation's healthcare system would ultimately become a medical hub with a major investment deal coming to the country.

"Having NiDCOM on board as a partner will help in attracting Nigerian medical personnel

working in the diaspora to tap into their expertise and capacity building," she added.

The CEO further assured the AMCE team: "With the assemblage of this wonderful team, I am optimistic that the project is already a huge success. I, therefore, assure you of our support and partnership in this regard."

For Dabiri-Erewa, if the vision and mission of the project were fully implemented as conceived, they would overhaul the current situation of the nation's health sector.

On his part, Deaver described the project as a world-class medical service hub aimed at providing efficient healthcare delivery in Nigeria, especially in cancer and cardiovascular-related treatments.

According to him, the centre would reverse the flow of external medical tourism, which is estimated at $6 billion annually.

The AMCE CEO continued: "With the ongoing project in Nigeria, over 1000 Nigerian medical and non-medical staffers will be recruited and gainfully employed."

Deaver is also certain that this would be one of the many world-class cancer treatment and diagnosis centres to be built in Nigeria with over $700 million in funding support from AfreximBank.

Stakeholders Urge State Governments to Domesticate National Mental Health Act

Adedayo Akinwale in Abuja

The Mental Health Community has called on the State governments to domesticate the National Mental Health Act.

It also called on those contesting for elected office to make mental health a national priority.

President Muhammad Buhari recently signed the National Mental Health Bill 2021 into law, marking a major milestone in Nigeria's efforts to improve support for psychosocial wellbeing.

The Bill had been in the works for over 20 years, but all previous attempts at legislative overhaul of the sector in 2003 and 2013 failed.

Reacting to the signing of the Bill into law, the Founder of Nigerian Mental Health, Chime Asonye, said the legislation was a product of decades of advocacy from diverse organizations.

He said: "The mental health community came together to speak with one voice in support of the Bill. We now need Executive implementation, state governments to domesticate this legislation, and those contesting for elected office to make mental health a national priority."

Asonye also called on the government to enact other critical reforms for those with mental health conditions, such as decriminalising attempted suicide, which is currently a felony subject to a year in prison.

Also, the President of the National Association of Clinical Psychologists, Prof. Gboyega Abikoye said the Act was the first legislative reform adopted in the field since the country's Independence.

He explained that the Act establishes human rights protections for those with mental health conditions, such as banning discrimination in housing, employment, medical, and other social services.

Abikoye added that the Act also guarantees that those receiving treatments have the right to participate in formulating their medical plans and cannot have forced treatment, seclusion, or other methods of restraint — common practices in mental health facilities — without appropriate safeguards.

He said: "Past legislation was outdated and inhumane. The previous regulatory regime was based on the regional Lunacy Act of 1958, a colonial holdover that needed to be replaced."

He noted that other provisions of the Bill include establishing a new Mental Health Fund, a Mental Health Department in the Federal Ministry of Health, and a Mental Health Assessment Committee to protect stakeholders.

Abikoye stressed that the Act expands community-based coverage and improves the care and management of those with mental health conditions.

"While there is still a long way to go in developing the mental health sector in Nigeria, this law is a step in the right direction," he said.

250ml Milk Daily Best for Children's Growth – Says Nutritionist

Rebecca Ejifoma

A Registered Dietician and Director of Dietetics at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Bolanle Tijani, has recommended the daily consumption of 250ml of milk, an equivalent of two cups, as best for every child's brain development.

She shared with THISDAY more insights into the benefits of milk for children. Citing the World Health Organisation (WHO), the dietician noted, "Every child must have a cup of milk that is about 250ml daily. Having more than that is okay."

Tijani also illustrated that the ideal size of sachet milk is 100ml. "Milk is a whole meal. It has almost all the nutritional values, especially calcium which is good for strong bones."

Adding, she highlighted that milk has complete protein. "Milk is classified as a high biological value protein; this implies that the protein will be completely available for the child to utilise."

She recommended, however, that a glass cup of milk daily for children helps the brain. Adding, she emphasised that milk contains saturated fat and polyunsaturated fat. "Milk also contains a source of vitamin D and carbohydrates."

For Tijani, Nigeria can afford milk for every child daily if the government can provide at least two sachets for children to help them grow properly.

"However, that is not feasible at the moment as some families cannot afford it," she admitted.

According to research, milk affords children essential nutrients like calcium, protein, choline, potassium and Vitamin D. Protein and calcium are said to be two nutrients linked to growth status in childhood and puberty

Cancer Research UK also added that these nutrients are said to help develop and maintain healthy bones and teeth and may help to reduce the risk of bowel cancer.

FERTILITY

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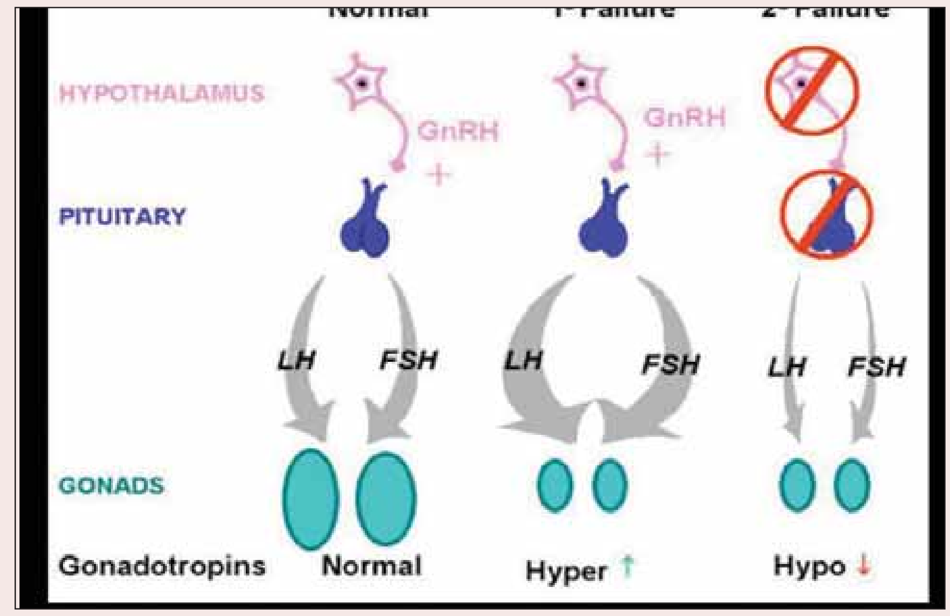
Female Hypogonadism Part 2



In the past edition, we defined Female Hypogonadism explaining the types, signs and symptoms, clinical features, causes and diagnosis of female hypogonadism. This week, we will conclude with more diagnosis, complications and treatment.

4. Hormone analysis –

• Sex hormone levels should also be examined if symptom of hypogonadism persists. A blood test will be required to determine levels of follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH) produced by the pituitary gland.

• For females, the estrogen levels should be checked while in males, the testosterone level is measured. It is essential to perform these tests in the morning when the hormone levels are at their peak. Semen analysis may also be done in males to determine sperm count as hypogonadism may cause a decrease in sperm count.

• It is essential to examine for high blood iron levels as this can have an impact on sex hormones.

• Prolactin levels should also be checked. Prolactin is a hormone that promotes breast development and milk production in women.

• The thyroid hormone levels may also be checked. Thyroid issues can cause symptoms that are similar to hypogonadism.

5. Imaging examinations – these tests may also help with diagnosis. An ultrasound creates an image of the ovaries using sound waves to detect any problems, such as ovarian cysts and polycystic ovary syndrome. To check for tumors in your pituitary gland, an MRI or CT scan may be conducted as well. The physician may conduct a physical examination to confirm that sexual development such as muscle mass, body hair and sexual organs is at the proper level with age.

COMPLICATIONS IN FEMALE HYPOGONADISM

Infertility is the most common complication of hypogonadism. Complications can arise as a result of a lack of hormones, such as:

- Risk of breast cancer;
- Heart attack or strokes;
- Loss of muscle mass;
- Alteration in bone mass;
- Changes in mood.

Long-term oestrogen deficiency risks include an increased risk of osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease. The risk is greater with a younger age of onset. Breast cancer risk, on the other hand, may be slightly reduced.

Oestrogen has a key role in maintaining skin health. Oestrogen aids in the maintenance of skin thickness and collagen levels, as well as skin elasticity and moisture. It is also known to help with wound healing.

TREATMENT OF FEMALE HYPOGONADISM

The treatment of female hypogonadism entails addressing the underlying cause. Treatment may involve:

- Injection of GnRH
- Injection of human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG)
- Correction of diet and nutrition
- Calcium and vitamin supplement
- Oestrogen and progesterone containing oral contraceptives
- Stress management

When possible, hypogonadism treatment focuses on the underlying pathology, assisting the woman in becoming fertile if desired, and preventing the long-term complications of increased cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and urogenital atrophy.

Women of reproductive age who have hypogonadism should in general, receive hormone replacement therapy. However, specialist input should be sought, as there are potential significant complications of hormone therapy. Hormone replacement therapy is primarily concerned with replacing estrogen, which your body no longer produces. Estrogen therapy is classified into two types:

1. Systemic Hormone Therapy – systemic estrogen, which can be taken as a pill, ring, cream, skin patch, gel or spray, contains a higher dose of estrogen that is absorbed throughout the body.

2. Low-doseVaginal Estrogen Preparations– in the form of cream, tablet, or ring, reduces the amount of estrogen absorbed by the body.

What are the dangers of hormone replacement therapy?

Studies suggest that hormone replacement therapy with an estrogen-progestin pill increased the risk of certain serious conditions. Subsequent research has indicated that these risks vary depending on.

1. Age - However, if hormone therapy is initiated before the age of 60 or within the first ten years of menopause, the benefits appear to outweigh the risks.

2. Type of Hormone therapy - The risks of hormone therapy differ depending on whether estrogen is given alone or in combination with progestin, as well as the dose and type of estrogen used.

3. Medical history - Family history, personal medical history, history of cancer, heart disease, liver disease, stroke, blood clots, and osteoporosis are all important considerations when deciding the right hormone replacement therapy.

CONCLUSION

To stay healthy and active, both men and women must maintain an ideal weight, eat a healthy balanced diet, and exercise on a regular basis. Although most of the known causes of hypogonadism cannot be avoided, it is still beneficial to maintain a healthy active lifestyle throughout and incorporate regular exercise into your daily routine.Early detection and correct diagnosis are critical in order to stop the source of the problem before it causes further damage.You do not have to suffer for a long time if you have Hypogonadism, which is a treatable disease. With the right amount of treatment and the guidance of a medical expert, you can easily free yourself from the harsh effects of sex gland defects.

Ikeja Metro Lions Club Flags Off Medical Equipment Project

Mary Nnah

Ikeja Metro Lions Club, one of the top leading clubs in District 404B2 Nigeria, has recorded another milestone, as it flagged off the first phase of the groundbreaking ceremony of its proposed N40 million medical equipment project and renovation of the intensive care unit (ICU) of Gbagada General Hospital, Lagos State.

The project, when completed, will increase the survival rate of patients, Nigerians with critical medical history seeking urgent medical services and prevent deaths that could be averted through qualitative healthcare.

The ceremony was performed by District Governor Lion Aare Olalekan Owolabi; President of the club, Godson Anigbo; Chief Medical Director, Babafemi Olusegun; management and staff of Gbagada General Hospital and Ikeja Metro Lions Club.

Owolabi, in his remarks, lauded the club for embarking on such huge projects despite the cost which runs into millions of naira just to impact lives.

Owolabi said that the club has been consistent with humanitarian deeds. Intervention in a tertiary health institution like this is worthwhile because of its impact. This is a strategically located tertiary health institution. And from what the CMD said, over 45,000 patients every month patronised the facility, which is a very big figure.

He added that Lions meant to intervene and upgrade the infrastructures of the hospital and ensure that they have a conducive atmosphere for patients to dwell I think it is a worthwhile project.

He said: "This project will cost them a lot of money. With what we have seen at the groundbreaking ceremony, we can see that the place needs a massive intervention in terms of repairing some of the damaged walls, coming out to painting and equipment, it is going to be a huge cost."

Owolabi urged Nigerians to support humanitarian deeds and stressed the need to berth Lions club in Gbagada because "the more we are the more impact we would achieve. Service organizations like this, especially Lions Clubs have international platforms and members across the world, if we have more members means we have more hands and resources to make the required impact.

"Infrastructural development of our community is a necessity for us as Lions. We have been doing huge projects and society's demands have been numerous.

"We need volunteers to join Lions Club for a better life impact. We should continue to increase because of the increase in population. The more we have members here and there to partner with their time, talent and treasures the greater impact we would make in the society."

On his part, the club president, Godson Anigbo said that when he joined Lions Club he discovered that children equally suffer cancer and he resolved within himself that if he has the opportunity he would make an impact in that area.

Anigbo and his team embarked on a need assessment exercise and met with some obstacles. They made inquiries from some hospitals that told them they don't have the certification to operate on childhood cancer.

Faced with this challenge, they visited LASUTH which gave them an estimated cost of N100 million target which was quite huge. "We went to another general hospital that referred us to go to Gbagada for us to achieve the project.

"However, when we got to the hospital in Gbagada, we met Mrs. Dosumu who hinted to us about the rate at which patients died on their way to ICU, including her precious sister. We had the opportunity and met with the medical director, Babafemi Olusegun, who presented the most crucial need to us. That was how we berthed the project.

"Although we have decided to embark on this massive project, we would still attend the children's cancer challenge."

Babafemi expressed gratitude to the club for embarking on the project, which is a massive renovation and equipment in the ICU. He explained that patients with emergencies die on their way to the Intensive Care Unit because they don't have an ICU facility that will offer services on the spot, especially those with severe health issues.

The CMD disclosed that he was in a meeting when he was informed of the club's visit, he hurriedly attended to them and he found out it was a very good project for the people of Gbagada because the project, when completed, is going to offer ICU services for Lagosians.

He added that government alone cannot do it all. "What we need to do is partner with individuals and organisations that can deliver services to people," he said.

Babafemi called on Lagosians to access the Ilera Eko Health insurance scheme. According to him, everyone can be part of it, especially the indigent Nigerians who cannot afford medical services.

Also, the Core Project for 2022-2023 Lions Service Year Chairman, Lion Blessing Uzoamaka Umebali said to renovate and fully equip the intensive care unit (ICU) of Gbagada General Hospital, which will cost almost 50 million naira.

Umebali stated that before they chose the project, there was a heart-touching story, told by the head of the department, Mrs. Dosumu, during the club needs assessment visitation.

District Governor, 404B2 Nigeria, Lion Olalekan Owolabi (3rd left) with the Shovel to commence the Renovation and Equipping of the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) for Gbagada General Hospital; he is flanked by Core Project Chairperson, Lion Blessing Umebali; Club President Ikeja Metro Lions Club, Lion Godson Ikechukwu Anigbo; MD/CEO, Gbagada General Hospital, Dr. Babafemi Olusegun and other during the ground-breaking ceremony, held in Lagos recently

NAFDAC: Strong Regulatory System Sine Qua Non for Safe, Effective Quality Medicines, Vaccines in Low-Income Countries

Rebecca Ejifoma

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) says only a strong regulatory system would guarantee and accelerate the development, approval, and access to safe and effective quality therapeutic medicines and vaccines in low, to medium-income countries of the world.

The Director General of NAFDAC, Prof Mojisola Adeyeye, asserted this at the University of California San Francisco-Stanford Centre of Excellence in Regulatory Science and Innovation, US hybrid summit.

With the theme, "Building a Global Vision for Product and Drug Development: Challenges and Opportunities", Adeyeye admonished nations on strengthening regulatory system in compliance with the World Health Assembly Resolution 67.20 of 2014 to build the capacity of member states to have access to quality medicines to different low, medium income countries.

She said the World Health Organisation supports member states to reach and sustain effective regulatory oversight of medical products through the regulatory systems strengthening RSS programme.

The NAFDAC boss explained to the global audience how the agency under her leadership used the WHO Global Benchmarking Tools to achieve the Maturity Level 3 WHO Certification Status last March and its significance to Nigeria.

"Using US FDA as a reference which is categorised as Maturity Level 4, you cannot get Maturity Level 3 without taking care of all the indicators under Levels 1, and 2.

Speaking on "Global Benchmarking Tool and Access to Medicines" Adeyeye insisted that there is no 95 or 99 per cent in terms of WHO Global Benchmarking.

According to the prof, the GBT essentially facilitated NAFDAC to identify weaknesses and strengths in licensing of products, in the manufacturers' and distributors' compliance, and in how effective its post-marketing surveillance is.

"Are we doing containment of market control in terms of illicit trade, are we doing well in terms of regulatory inspection; good manufacturing practice compliance, are the manufacturers adhering to that? How good are our laboratories?" she argued.

In a statement by NAFDAC media consultant, Sayo Akintola, in Lagos on Wednesday, Adeyeye, disclosed to the summit that NAFDAC was benchmarked on seven functions plus licensing establishment which is under the Pharmacy Council of Nigeria (PCN) jurisdiction. "Both agencies were benchmarked together," she added.

She said the Agency met and satisfied 268 indicators and 860 recommendations, adding that the 268 indicators were distributed under Maturity Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4. "We were able to attain Maturity Level 3 after meeting all the requirements.

UNILAG VC, Prof Ogunsola Commends LUTH, Promises Collaboration

Rebecca Ejifoma

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Prof Folasade Ogunsola has commended the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) for the quality services and infrastructure in place, as she promised to collaborate with the hospital.

The VC made this remark during her working visit with her team to the College of Medicine and LUTH, Idi-Araba in Lagos on Wednesday.

Ogunsola, who appreciated the CMD of LUTH for the remarkable initiative in the hospital, beckoned Nigerians to visit the facility.

"What we are seeking at LUTH is that we will continually move into the future. I would love to invite everyone in the public space who hasn't been to LUTH to come and change their minds here. LUTH works and I want to commend them," she emphasised.

According to Ogunsola, she is hopeful that her visit would further strengthen the relationship between the college and the hospital. She emphasised: "Over the years, there has been some drift but what I'm hoping that with my visit we are supposed to be one."

During her visit to the college, the VC met with all heads of departments to get first-hand information on their activities and assure them of support and collaboration.

"In the area of research, clearly there is a lot of collaboration between the college and LUTH in the area of health."

On his part, the Chief Medical Director of LUTH, Prof Chris Bode lauded the VC for her particular interest in prevention and control.

Earlier, the SCFN/LUTH brought succour to sickle cell patients after it unveiled the Flow Cytometer at the state-of-the-art Bone Marrow Transplant centre to curb medical tourism in Nigeria and Africa

This major equipment in the Stem Cell Processing Laboratory of this Bone Marrow Transplant Centre aims to cure these patients for safe, quality and more affordable bone marrow transplantation.

The Dir/CEO of SCFN, Dr Annette Akinsete, in her presentation, said "On behalf of the Top Management Committee of the Sickle Cell Foundation Nigeria/LUTH BMT Centre.

"It has been over 10 years since we embarked on this BMT journey, starting with our partnership with the Mediterranean Institute of Haematology, Rome; whereby nearly 50 Nigerian children travelled to Rome and were successfully transplanted, free of charge."

She further expressed profound appreciation to NNPC/CHEVRON JV for making this feat a reality. Akinsete added, "When we reached out to you in 2021, it was a shot in the dark guided by faith.

"Fortunately, we got a response – shaky at first I might add, until we somehow convinced a team to visit us at the centre."

PPC Equips Nizamiye Hospital with Cath-Lab

PPC Limited, Nigeria's leading engineering and infrastructure development company with footprints across Nigeria's healthcare landscape, has successfully completed the installation of a Cath-Lab at Nizamiye Hospital in Abuja, to aid efficient medical operations.

The project involved the installation of Philips Azurion 3 F15 Cath-Lab, a smart imaging equipment, designed to perform a wide range of routine and complex clinical procedures with clear imaging resolutions that helps clinicians optimize lab performance.

Through PPC's partnership with Philips, a global leader in health technology, Nizamiye hospital was equipped with the capability to perform image-guided therapy that allows the hospital to give superior care and perform clinical procedures with ease.

The use of the innovative Philips Azurion Cath-Lab will help clinicians at Nizamiye Hospital administer reliable and precise medical diagnostics while carrying out smooth clinical interventions.

PPC's expertise in ELV installation enabled the seamless installation of all electrical systems, lighting, UPS systems, hemodynamics and electrophysiology systems in the Cath-Lab. The Head of PPC Healthcare, Dr Chikara Nwoke, said, "The project is one of the many ways PPC collaborates with hospitals, supports patient care and improves the quality of healthcare delivery in the country. The need to ensure patients are given the right healthcare outcomes and patient experience means providing clinicians with dependable diagnostic tools.

"The use of medical technologies is one of the ways to limit risks associated with inaccurate diagnosis and improve the quality of life of patients," he added.

To ensure optimal uptime for the equipment, PPC also provides best-in-class maintenance support which involves the training of in-house technical personnel, after-sales repair services and preventive maintenance services.

The Cath-Lab's unique features such as ClarityIQ technology, which reduces radiation exposure to patients and staff in the interventional lab, Zero Dose Positioning, which provides intuitive feedback on positioning the region of interest in the image beam without using fluoroscopy; coupled with MRC x-ray tubes and powerful real-time image processing for excellent imaging, makes it a perfect fit for safe and accurate clinical procedures.

PPC Healthcare is committed to improving healthcare outcomes through the installation of advanced medical equipment for clinical investigation, diagnosis and treatment across healthcare facilities in every state of Nigeria.

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OPINION

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A LEADER WHO DELIVERS

Leo Irabor, Chief of Defence Staff, is steadfast in the performance of his duties, writes ***GONDO L. GONDO***

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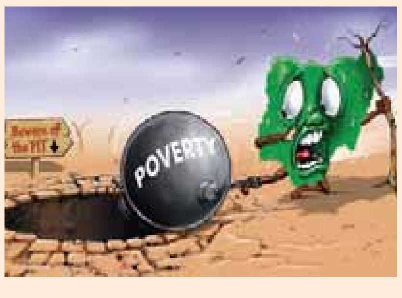
PANDEMIC OF EMPTY POCKETS

Almost all Nigerians have become poorer in naira terms over the last eight years, contends ***SEUN AWOGBENLE***



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EDITORIAL

TACKLING THE GROWING INEQUALITY

22

***MONDAY PHILIPS EKPE** writes that the persistent petrol scarcity appears to have become an intractable tradition*

WINDING FUEL QUEUES OF DESPAIR

The only thing the Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Chief Timipre Sylva, did not say last week was to swear by 'sango', 'sopona' and 'orumila'. But he did put words together, through his media aide, to try to convince Nigerians that his boss, President Muhammadu Buhari who is also the Minister of Petroleum, did not endorse any hike in the prices of petroleum products, contrary to the rumours that fuelled the latest scarcity and the resultant long queues at filling stations across the country.

Sylva was both defensive and emphatic. According to him, "President Muhammadu Buhari has not approved any increase in the price of PMS or any other petroleum product for that matter. There is no reason for President Muhammadu Buhari to renege on his earlier promise not to approve any increase in the price of PMS at this time. Mr. President is sensitive to the plight of the ordinary Nigerian and has said repeatedly that he understands the challenges of the ordinary Nigerian and would not want to cause untold hardship for the electorate.

"Government will not approve any increase of PMS secretly without due consultations with the relevant stakeholders. The President has not directed the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA) or any agency for that matter to increase the price of fuel. This is not the time for any price increase in pump price of PMS. What is playing out is the handiwork of mischief makers and those planning to discredit the achievements of Mr. President in the oil and gas sector of the economy. I appeal to Nigerians to remain calm and law abiding as the government is working hard to bring normalcy to fuel supply and distribution in the country."

Probably in response to that forceful denial, a Daily Times newspaper frontpage dated June 7, 1977 was pulled out of the archives and began to trend on the social media. "Fuel Crisis May Be Over Next Year," the lead headline, sat on the photograph of a much younger Buhari who was the federal commissioner in charge of the sector at the time. Of course, the publication was made to go viral with the hope that the citizens would see that the more times change, the more things or, rather, their plights remain the same. As symbolic, ironic and indicting as the president's perpetual presence on the petroleum platform is, tying the challenges of the industry solely around his neck would be unfair and missing the point. For, we are where we are today as, arguably, the only major producer of crude oil on earth with the worst supply profile of the refined products, mainly because various administrations have failed to get things right.

One other thing that makes Sylva's intervention awkward is that there was a time in this same country when words from an 'honourable' minister could be taken as gospel truth, when the people could rely on the policy or operational pronouncements from government officials upon which to base their plans and hope for tomorrow. Not anymore,

unfortunately.

Lo and behold, last Sunday, after buying petrol from a Nigerian National Petroleum Company outlet in Abuja at 194 naira per litre, up from 179, I knew at once that I would have to comment soon again on government's insensitivity in the area of taking undue advantage of the failure of Nigerians to hold their leaders to account. Only last week on this page, I added my voice to the callous manner in which electricity tariffs are being hiked. An official statement from the Ministry of Power had shamelessly denied knowledge of the recent increase in electricity tariff. It's better I don't narrate the troubles that went into last weekend's petrol purchase, a transaction that should ordinarily be taken for granted. Reports of the harrowing experiences of people as they forage for fuel are already being widely documented, distributed and transmitted via numerous media outlets. There is hardly any part of the country that is left out of this general drama of pain. The more worrying part is that the end is not even in sight.

This national embarrassment may well be on its way to becoming integrated into our psyche and culture unless drastic, sincere and holistic steps are taken to correct the current course. A quick look at the history of pump price increment. At the beginning of the present republic in 1999, one litre of petrol was 20 naira. After a process of rising and falling and rising again, President Olusegun Obasanjo left it in 2007 at 75 naira. The short-lived government of President Umaru Yar'Adua actually ended with a reduction by 10 naira. President Goodluck Jonathan whose government witnessed some of the strongest oppositions to price hikes managed to leave petrol at 85 naira. The protests under him were so pronounced that fuel pricing and availability formed a major leg of Buhari's electioneering campaigns. Now, the nation's travails are there for everyone to see.

Oil and gas jargon and analyses, as things stand, are increasingly meaningless especially to average Nigerians who have continued to bear the brunt of these vicissitudes, most of which are self-inflicted…. This mishandled energy sector remains highly combustible, literally and otherwise

It's impossible to discuss petrol shortages independent of the prices. Subsidy of the products has since assumed a life of its own in Nigeria. Allegations of massive frauds associated with it seem to be so difficult to prove or disprove that the people have decided that they are real. And, like many other components of our national life, the political will to frontally address the issues surrounding this critical aspect is clearly lacking. It is unfortunate that even without officially withdrawing it, prices have gone wild in many parts of the country, with some authorised marketers selling petrol as high as 400 naira per litre. Understandably, longer queues are found in places like Abuja and Lagos where some levels of regulation and monitoring still exist.

The trauma occasioned by this dilemma keeps announcing itself in the form of wasted manhours, prohibitive production costs, further pressures on scarce resources, heightened anger in the land, inflamed poverty proliferation, avoidable fire tragedies, costly transportation of people and goods with the ripple effects, rapidly vanishing trust in government, and lots more. Oil and gas jargon and analyses, as things stand, are increasingly meaningless especially to average Nigerians who have continued to bear the brunt of these vicissitudes, most of which are self-inflicted. Those who are quick to lay the blames for this situation on the Russia-Ukraine war that has negatively impacted energy supplies globally should remember that our own matters predate that. Successive governments and relevant agencies that have fallen short of instituting proven and sustainable structures and some private players, large and small, have consistently worked in concert to produce what we now have as a national monster and albatross. Sharp practices like bribery at depots and filling stations, deliberate rationing of available fuel to create artificial crunch and stimulate exorbitant sales, touting, and diversion of products to local and cross-border black markets have bred pseudo millionaires and billionaires, and plenty of anarchy.

But to throw our arms up in defeat would be to betray the typical fighting spirit that many living Nigerians can testify about. Not being able to maintain and operate functional refineries to at least serve domestic demand is not the fault of ordinary Nigerians. So is the inability of government operatives to tackle individuals and entities that sabotage the measures put in place to achieve an optimum downstream environment. The people, however, must wake up to the duty of making their leaders responsible and also collectively dealing with the criminals who are bent on frustrating the common good. One way or the other, this mishandled energy sector remains highly combustible, literally and otherwise. It mustn't consume us all with our eyes open.

Dr Ekpe
is a member of THISDAY Editorial Board

Leo Irabor, Chief of Defence Staff, is steadfast in the performance of his duties, writes GONDO L. GONDO

A LEADER WHO DELIVERS

Napoleon Bonaparte, a former French military commander and political leader who rose to prominence during the French Revolution, once said, "Read over and over again the campaigns of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus, Turenne, Eugene, and Fredrick. This is the only way to become a great general and master the secrets of the art of war."

General Leo Irabor, like the great men mentioned above, is a true war commander and defender. He has been a guiding light in the darkness that has since enveloped the Nigerian space when insecurity reigned supreme. By his commitment to ending

the ravaging scourge of Boko Haram and other security threats, General Irabor has demonstrated to this generation that there can be a positive metamorphosis from gloomy days to glorious days. He has proven that the President Buhari-led administration made the right decision in bringing him on board as the Chief of Defence Staff up to this point. Have you seen, in this generation, a man who is so principled? Have you seen in this country a man who can take the bull by the horns to emancipate the people from the clutches of apprehension and insurgency?

General Irabor is that man for the job. This is one man who has distinguished himself by believing that change does not arrive on the wheels of inevitability but rather through constant struggle. Even the blind can see that he has rid the military of almost the bag eggs that have aided and abated insecurity while also restoring staff discipline through synergy and promotion of inter-agency cooperation amongst the armed forces and the Nigeria Police force. Indeed, he deserves a standing ovation.

The Delta State-born general gained admission into the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) in Kaduna as a member of the 34 Regular Course in 1983 and was commissioned a second lieutenant on June 28, 1986, into the Signal Corps of the Nigerian Army. In his quest to grow and explore knowledge like the great philosophers of old, he attended military and civil courses within and outside the country. He attended the Armed Forces Command and Staff College, Jaji for his junior staff course in 1995, and the Ghana Armed Forces Staff College, Teshi, Accra, for the senior staff course in 2000/2001. In his quest to keep studying and distinguish himself among his equals, he attended the National Defence College in Bangladesh in 2010 and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and Executive Education in the USA in 2012 and 2017. General Lucky Irabor earned a bachelor's degree in engineering from Obafemi Awolowo University and two master's degrees from the University of Ghana and Bangladesh University of Professional, Dhaka.

Before he became the 17th Chief of Defence Staff in January 2021, he served as Theatre Commander of Operation Lafia Dole, which later became Operation Hadin Kai. I remember vividly that before his assumption of office as CDS, the country was wallowing in insecurity of great dimensions. People, especially in the North East, lost their source of livelihood; mayhem was being unleashed by the deadly religious sect, Boko Haram, and the citizens were dismayed and lost touch with peace. It was a horrifying tale. In the south-east, IPOB's separatist movement affected lives and property negatively. But the General Irabor-led administration as the Chief of Defence Staff brought solutions to all these puzzles that beclouded the nation, which for me can't be forgotten, even in the next generation.

President Buhari, who in his wisdom appointed him as the CDS, knew that General Irabor had all the leadership capacity and acumen to flourish in the new assignment; he knew that rot needed to be eschewed and discipline brought to the fore. This was a front-burner issue at that time. Apparently, he made no mistake handing over the mantle of leadership to him. He was aware that he was a no-nonsense man who would not take "no" for an answer. It happened exactly as the president predicted.

General Irabor, after taking the appointment, knew it was going to be a big task to crack down on the security crises that were perpetuated by Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), kidnappers, and other kinds of threats to the collective peace of the Nigerian people. So he rolled up his sleeves, engaged in critical thinking, and began to dish out his jobs in collaboration with other security chiefs and relevant stakeholders. In a matter of weeks after his appointment as the Chief of Defence Staff, he revealed his command philosophy, christened PEARL. PEARL means a Nigerian military who is Professional, Effective, Agile, Result-oriented, and Loyal to constituted authority. Obviously, this philosophy spurred the military to stand firm in the defence of the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. For me, I think "PEARL" has to be written on a marble so that the generation yet to be born who are going to be soldiers in the future will always have recourse to it. I remember that, when one Nigerian soldier was interviewed, he said, "At the sight of General Lucky Irabor, our boss, there is this fire of motivation in me right now to push hard and crackdown on these elements of conflict in our nation. Nigeria belongs to all of us, and we will overcome by the grace of God."

Is the above assertion by a soldier not enough to prove that the general is the man of the people?

Under the leadership of General Irabor, many security and intelligence services were organized. He authored gender policy for the Armed Forces and built a very healthy relationship between the Nigerian Army and other countries' armed forces. This is spectacular. Some of those countries are the Niger Republic, Chad, etc. Through his intervention, so many abducted citizens have gained freedom from the hands of their captors. This is a significant feat. ■

Gondo
writes from the United Kingdom

Almost all Nigerians have become poorer in naira terms over the last eight years, contends ***SEUN AWOGBENLE***

PANDEMIC OF EMPTY POCKETS

Make no mistake about it; there is another pandemic in town, unlike the one before it, this pandemic does not affect the lung or liver, rather the pocket of Nigerians, leaving more families poor while for many surviving each day has become an achievement!

Growing up, one of the prayers I heard people say frequently in Yoruba, loosely translated in English is that "may your pockets never run dry". The prayer was a metaphor for abundance, plenty and replenishment, following an act of kindness! Today, I am reminded that it is perhaps the single most important prayer in today's Nigeria, as we all meander through the current economic hardship and financial strain.

In the last eight years, the price of basic staples, such as bread, rice, cereals, potatoes,

yam, fish, meat and oil, have increased exponentially, leading to a decline in individual and household income. In November 2022, the country's headline inflation hit a 17-year high, at 21.47%; the highest recorded since September 2005 and at least 6.07% higher than what was recorded in November 2021. The reality today is that, almost all Nigerians have become poorer in naira terms over the last eight years, while those at the lower rung of the ladder have been condemned to near destitution and despair!

The implication of the economic strain is that every minute, more Nigerians fall below the poverty line, as a result of the steady rise in headline and food inflation, without proportionate improvement in purchasing power and household income. I am however worried that more than any other time, Nigeria is at the risk of cultivating an army of poor, hungry and angry citizens, who can potentially be a destabilising force rather than a force for good!

In September 2022, the exchange rate of the naira crossed the N700 mark to $1 and has steadily exchanged for N735/$1, since then, at some time even more. Since October 2022, Nigerians have endured the impact of fuel scarcity, within the period, fuel has sold at an average of N250 per litre in Lagos where I live, it is reported that some petrol stations even sell for as high as N300 a litre, from N169 in September 2022. The scarcity alone has had a significant impact on the cost of transportation and the general cost of food items!

Let us take food inflation for example, eight years ago, a 50Kg bag of rice was sold between N7500 and N8500, today the same Kilogram of rice sells for an average of N35, 000 to N40, 000, in some places even more. Within the same period, a crate of egg, which used to sell for N700, today the same egg is sold for an average of N2000. Again, within the same period, the average price of fish was N900; today the same fish sells for N1800 and even more in some places.

As at mid-2022, a 70g of noodle was sold for an average price of N80, today the same gramme of noodles sells for at least N130, same for a 500g of bread which rose from N400 to N800; about double the price, while a 500g of golden penny semovita now cost N550 from N300 within the same period. May our pockets never run dry. Amen.

From destitution, homelessness, despair, inequality, unemployment and hunger, the implication is already clear, according to the Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index released in November 2022; about 133 million Nigerians are living in multidimensional poverty. The bureau noted that the increase in the level of poverty was as a result of deprivations in sanitation, healthcare, food security and housing.

Today, our human capital indices continue to degenerate, in 2018, the United Nations Human development Index ranked Nigeria 158 out of 189 countries, failing to stand shoulder to shoulder with countries like Singapore, Malaysia and even Brazil that were once in the same per capita income bracket in the 1960s. For the avoidance of doubt, Nigeria's Per Capita income has remained a paltry $2, 229 for a long time, compared to Malaysia's $11, 521.

There is no doubt that the economic crisis we currently have in our hands is largely the result of the clear failure of fiscal and monetary policy. While I agree that there are also extraneous factors that have impacted our economy, this is more about us than we would lazily want to hang on the global cost of living crisis and the Russia-Ukraine crisis!

Matter of factly, I find it curious, that those who are responsible for bringing Nigerians to this sorry pass, have continued to hold on to office without remorse, apology, responsibility or even resignation, I sometimes wonder how unconscionable political leaders can be to sit-tight while everything keeps crashing down on our heads. The other day, when a prime minister in the UK could not deliver on her campaign promises, she resigned in barely 43 days, where are Nigerian leaders to take a cue from such nobility?

I have always argued that the most important ingredient for good governance is political leadership. This is why I believe that the February 2023 elections is a fight for the future of Nigeria. Almost all our social and economic indices suggest that Nigeria cannot afford to get it wrong and only a competent and effective leadership can turn the tide to avoid a further slide.

While we await the outcome of the election, I commend my readers in the timeless prayer that "may your pockets never run dry". Amen. ■

Awogbenle
is a communications professional and the Author of The Urgency of Now

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EDITORIAL

TACKLING THE GROWING INEQUALITY

The Oxfam report is another wake-up call to address the imbalance in the society

The latest report from the UK-based charity Oxfam, 'Survival of the Richest' which documents enormous concentration of wealth in the hands of a few people both on the global stage and across countries should task the authorities in Nigeria. "While millions of Nigerians are unsure where their next meals will come from, the super-rich are getting richer and not paying their fair share of taxes but taking advantage of the complexities and loopholes in the tax legislation, as well as the lack of transparency and accountability in tax implementation, thereby depriving the country of the revenue needed for social protection and inequality reduction," revealed Oxfam.

Since 2020, according to the report, the richest one per cent have captured almost two-thirds of all new wealth—nearly twice as much money as the bottom 99 per cent of the global population. For the first time in 25 years, Oxfam report further reveals, there was an increase in wealth inequality and poverty 'simultaneously'. In what is described as another 'first', the United Nations Human Development Index—which measures life expectancy, expected years of schooling and inequality within a country—fell in nine out of every 10 countries in either 2020 or 2021.

One can argue that inequalities in the distribution of opportunities is not peculiar to Nigeria, and the Oxfam report confirms that. However, the situation in our country is becoming very desperate for majority of our people despite the denial by people in government. In Nigeria today, many basic services such as education, health and infrastructure are decrepit or in short supply, while a huge demographic crisis is looming. The consequences of this situation are not only for the victims but also those who feed fat at the expense of the poor in both the public and private sectors.

Therefore, the Oxfam report should be another wake-up call, especially for politicians who are currently campaigning for various executive and legislative positions in the coming general election. With the plight of the under-privileged steadily worsening and many going to bed with less than a survival diet, the challenge is for all critical stakeholders, including in the private sector. Indeed, the more worrisome aspect of the Nigerian condition is that poverty goes beyond the shortage of food, clothing, shelter and safe drinking water, all of which determine the quality of life. It is inclusive of educational attainment and gender inequality, for example.

The challenge of the moment is for the government to begin to deliver targeted and result-oriented policies that would ensure not only that our abilities are maximised but also that the resultant prosperity is shared

Going by the Commitment to Reducing Inequality (CRI) Index, which ranks governments based on what they are doing to tackle this gap, Nigeria fares badly because its social spending (on health, education and social protection) is abysmally low. By diverting scarce resources to private hands at the expense of much needed projects such as schools, hospitals, roads and reliable institutions, poverty and inequality are being reinforced. Millions are jobless while many of the employed are not paid living wages and therefore hardly leaving any room for savings. Others get their daily living from the streets. But the main problem has been in the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

The problems of unemployment, poverty, inequality, decayed infrastructure, insecurity, and serious challenges in social services like education and health, etc., are already telling. The solution can therefore not be in some tokenist programmes that are neither well thought-out nor enduring. The challenge of the moment is for the government, at all levels, to begin to deliver targeted and result-oriented policies that would ensure not only that our abilities are maximised but also that the resultant prosperity is shared. To bridge the gap between the few rich and the many poor in our country, we must make the economic system work for everyone.

Letters to the Editor

Letters in response to specific publications in THISDAY should be brief (150-300 words) and straight to the point. Interested readers may send such letters along with their contact details to **opinion@thisdaylive.com.** We also welcome comments and opinions on topical local, national and international issues provided they are well-written and should also not be longer than (750- 1000 words). They should be sent to **opinion@thisdaylive.com** along with photograph, email address and phone numbers of the writer.

LETTERS

DUE PROCESS OF OBTAINING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL IN FCT

The process of development or building in Abuja starts with obtaining valid title documents i.e. land documents that proves ownership which in the FCT is granted by the Minister.

When you get this allocation document, as soon as you are ready to commence development you come to the FCT Development Control Department which is currently in the process of simplifying this process in such a way that all lands based on their districts will put on its websites indicating the types of development required, because Abuja is a planned city with specific regulations in terms of building height, land use, setback, parking requirements, etc.

So, before anyone even commences design, the person ought to come to the Development Control Department. You may have what you want in mind but there are minimum design standards that have to be followed, and for you to do that, you have to have a copy of the FCT development control manual which will guide you.

For commercial development there are certain required documents e.g. environmental impact assessment report, and if it is going for more than two suspended floors there has to be a soil investigation report to tell us the type of soil and whether it has the carrying capacity, and even the type of foundation that you're going to have.

When all this is done there are teams that will visit the site and compare with the documents and reports you submitted. Once we're satisfied with these, we now look at the drawings viz-a-viz our requirements in the manual and now we compute what you are expected to pay to government, the building plan processing fee, and when you pay that we stamp your drawing and convey approval to you.

This is stage one. In stage two, which is now on site, before you commence you have to inform the development control department of the date you intend to commence having done the excavation and foundation based on initial approval.

Once officials give the OK, you will be permitted to commence, and continue with reinforcement, columns, beams, etc. Officials will continue to inspect the project until you reach the roofing stage, we call it stages inspection approval, to ensure there is conformity with land use because sometimes people modify what has been approved, from residential to commercial.

A certificate of completion and habitation is finally issued if everything is okay at the end and the owner can now enjoy his or her property. Considering the time frame for all these, the urban regional and planning law states that approval for building plans must be given within a 90-day period otherwise reasons must be given as to why it is not. This process is currently being reviewed in such a way that, bearing all circumstance, you get your permit within 60 days.

The fees to be paid for planning approval is subjective in the sense that it varies, from location to location, and phases, and residential is different from commercial or industrial. But the charges are based on volume of development, length, breadth, and height, thus the higher you go the higher the charge.

The challenges being faced in development control are seen as opportunities and when tackled, i.e. when people commence development, people are employed to work so this translates to rapid development of the FCT.

Regional development offices were recently created by the FCT Administration so this will ease the development processes.

For those that want to circumvent all these development process will lead to outright removal of such structures and we sanction the offenders. And we are also in the process of imposing stiffer penalties like imprisonment to deter people from violating the process.

Also any staff found involved in any scam the civil service rules would apply and this may lead to dismissal because some illegalities arise from compromise from within, so we don't compromise.

So anyone wishing to commence development in FCT should avoid quacks, they should come to the FCT Development Control Department for proper advice on how to go about it.

Mukhtar Usman Galadima,
Ag. Director, FCT Development Control Department

BUSINESSWORLD

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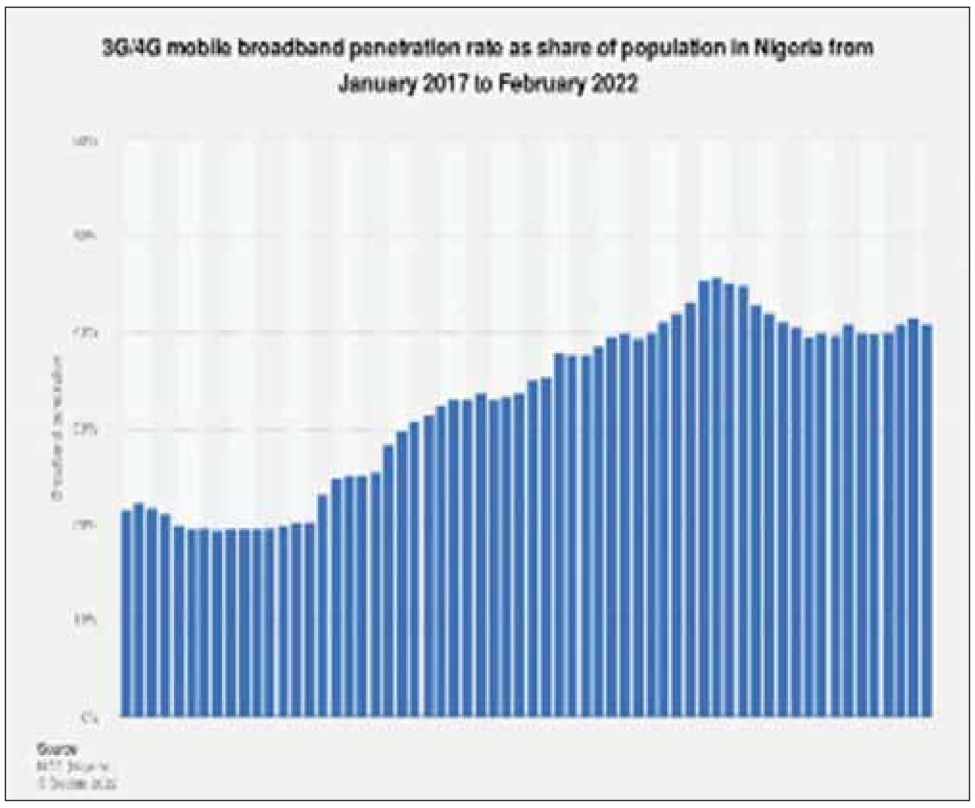
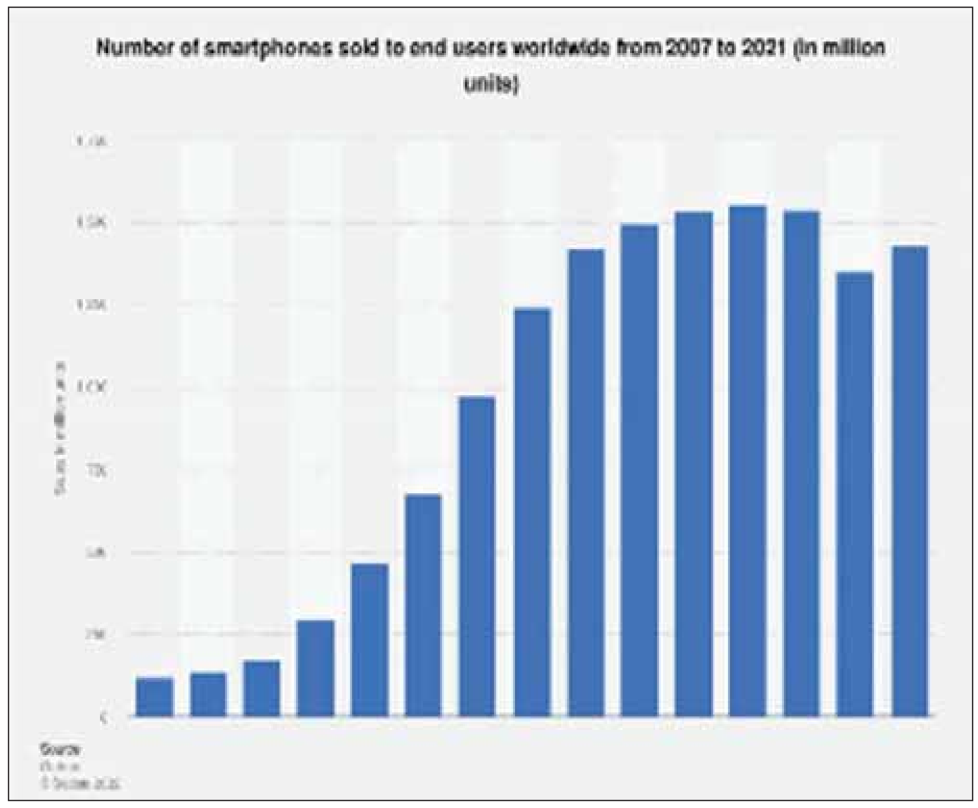
RATES AS AT JANUARY 25, 2023

MONEY MARKET		REPO		S & P INDEX		S & P INDEX		EXCHANGE RATE
OPR	11.25%	CALL	10.25%	INDEX LEVEL	613.31%	1/4 TO DATE	-0.85%	N416.86/1 US DOLLAR*
OVERNIGHT	11.50%	1-MONTH	9.56%	1-DAY	0.16%	YEAR TO DATE	7.64%	*AS AT LAST FRIDAY
		3-MONTH	10.52%	MONTH-TO-DATE	0.44%			

Telecom Subscriptions Maintain Steady Growth, Hit 222 Million in December





Emma Okonji

The latest statistics on telecom subscriptions that was released yesterday by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), the telecom industry regulator, puts telecom subscriptions at 222,571,568, as at December 31 2022, up from 218,953,849 that it attained in November same year.

According to the statistics, which THISDAY obtained from the official website of NCC, telecom subscriptions maintained a steady growth in 12 months, from January 2022 to December 2022.

Analysis of the numbers showed that in January 2022, the figure of telecom subscriptions was 197.5 million, with a teledensity of 103.46 per cent. In February 2022, the subscription figure rose to 198.1 million, with a teledensity of 103.79 per cent, with a further increase in subscriptions to 199.6 million with a teledensity of 104.54 per cent in March 2022. Again in April 2022, telecom subscriptions increased to 201.7 million, with a teledensity of 105.65 per cent. Then in May 2022, telecom subscriptions increased again to 204.6 million with a teledensity of 107.17 per cent. In June 2022, telecom subscriptions increased to 206.5 million, with a teledensity of 108.15 per cent, and a further increase in subscriptions in July to 208.9 million with a teledensity of 109.47 per cent.

In August 2022, telecom subscriptions increased again to 209.9 million with a teledensity of 109.99 per cent. Then in September and October 2022, telecom subscriptions increased to 212.2 million and 214.7 million respectively, with teledensity growth of 111.17 per cent and 112.47 per cent respectively. In November and December 2022, telecom subscriptions increased again to 218.9 million and 222.6 million respectively, with teledensity of 114.70 per cent and 116.60 per cent respectively.

Teledensity is defined as the number of active telephone connections per 100 inhabitants living within an area and is expressed as a percentage figure and it is calculated based on a population estimate of 190 million, up from 140 million in 2019.

The NCC numbers further gave the market share of each telecom operator, with MTN having the highest market share of 40.06 per cent, with a subscriber number of 89,016,678 on its network. Globacom, which is the third entrant into the Nigerian GSM market, has maintained the position of the second largest telecom operator, with a market share of 27.13 per cent

Continued on page 25

Again, Nigeria's Domain Name Users Increased from 181,275 in September to 183,169 in November 2022

Emma Okonji

For six consecutive months from June 2022 to November 2022, the Nigerian .ng domain name active users have continued to increase, a development that underscores the rising awareness among Nigerians, about the need to populate the .ng domain name, which is Nigeria's identity in cyberspace.

According to the latest statistics released by the Nigeria Internet Registration Association (NiRA), the body responsible for managing Nigeria's country code Top Level Domain (ccTLD), the total number of .ng domain name registration, increased from 181,275 in September 2022 to 183,169 in November 2022.

The latest statistics, which THISDAY obtained from the official website if NiRA, however shows a paltry registration figure, compared to the over 154 million active Nigerian internet users, many of whom operate online business.

According to the statistics, the total registration, renewal and restoration of .ng domain name was 181,275 in September 2022, but the figure increased in October to reach 181,983, with a further increase to 183,169 in November 2022.

The increase in figure came from the active 2nd level domain name users, which rose from 75,875 in September to 78,704 in October, before rising again to 81,607 in November 2022.

From the statistics, fresh registration of .ng domain name in September was 6,781, renewal was 4,837, while restoration was 153. In October, fresh registration of .ng domain name was 6,388, renewal was 4,773, while restoration dropped to 95. In November, fresh registration of .ng domain name was 6,177, renewal was 4,861, while restoration was 101.

The ccTLD .ng domain name is Nigeria's identity in cyberspace, which has the .ng at the suffix of every official email address that originates from Nigeria. In the United Kingdom, all official email addresses end with .co.uk, in United States of America, they end with .com, while in South Africa, official email addresses end with .co.za.

In Nigeria, NiRA has carried out several campaigns to sensitise Nigerians on the need to populate .ng domain name.

Reacting to the increased number of active .ng domain name users in the months of September, October and November 2022, the President of NiRA, Mr. Mohammed Rudman, told THISDAY that Nigerians were beginning to understand the need to identify with .ng domain name for every online transaction and communication.

In his new year 2023 message to Nigerians, Rudman said: "We have explored new collaborations, strengthened the relationships, with our esteemed Registrars and seen the resultant improvement in the perception of .ng in the market measured by an increase in its adoption. We are very excited about what 2023 has in store for us, having seen the impact of our activities in 2022 on the growth of the .ng domain. Our core operational objective remains to promote the stability, security, and

Continued on page 27

MARKET DATA AS AT WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2023

BONDS

DESCRIPTION	Price	Yield	Change (%)	Updated Time
^14.20 14-MAR-2024	10.362,00	10.82	-0.01	January 6, 2023
^13.53 23-MAR-2025	10.459,00	11.11	-0.71	January 6, 2023
^12.50 22-JAN-2026	10.287,00	11.35	0.00	January 6, 2023
^16.2884 17-MAR-2027	11.168,00	12.60	0.00	January 6, 2023
^13.98 23-FEB-2028	10.386,00	12.92	0.00	January 6, 2023

BILLS

MATURITY	Dis-count	Yield	Change (%)	Updated Time
NTB 26-Jan-23	3.01	3.01	-0.01	January 6, 2023
NTB 9-Feb-23	3.01	3.02	0.00	January 6, 2023
NTB 9-Mar-23	2.21	2.22	-1.71	January 6, 2023
NTB 27-Apr-23	3.20	3.23	0.00	January 6, 2023
NTB 11-May-23	3.23	3.27	0.00	January 6, 2023

CPS

MATURITY	Discount	Yield	Change (%)	Updated Time
FDHP CP III 17-MAR-23	9.26	9.43	0.00	January 6, 2023
VHPL CP III 1-APR-23	14.15	14.64	0.00	January 6, 2023
MREP CP VI 11-APR-23	10.52	10.81	-0.01	January 6, 2023
.	.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.	.

OTC FX FUTURES

CONTRACT TENOR (MONTH)	Contract	Current Rate ($/₦)	Updated Time
1	NGUS JAN 25 2023	469.87	January 6, 2023
2	NGUS FEB 22 2023	472.05	January 6, 2023
3	NGUS MAR 29 2023	474.23	January 6, 2023
4	NGUS APR 26 2023	476.42	January 6, 2023
5	NGUS MAY 31 2023	478.60	January 6, 2023

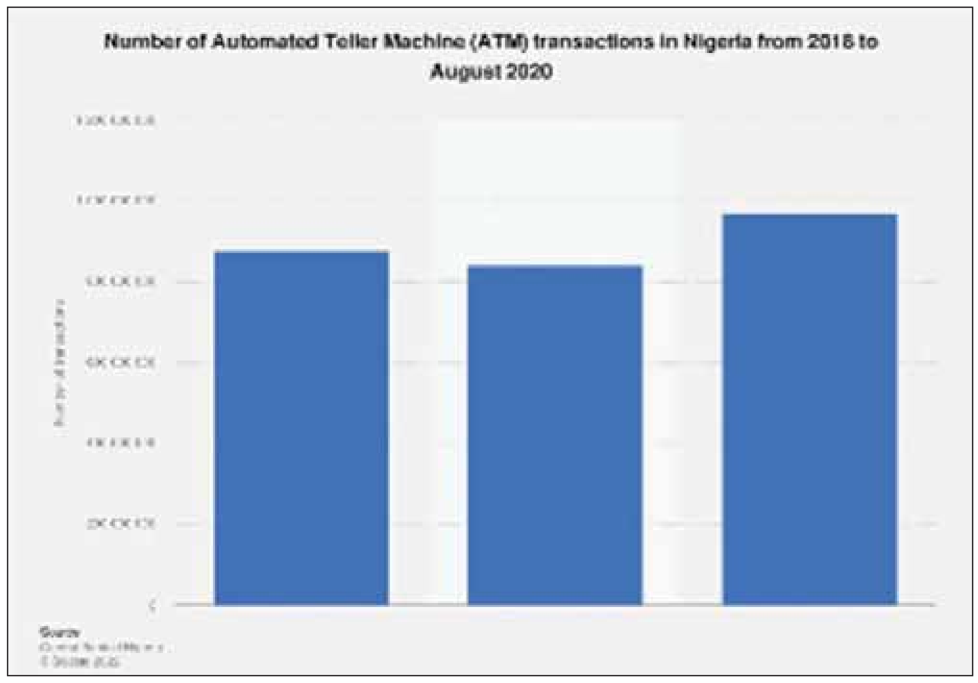
Role of ATMs, PoS in Cashless Policy

Emma Okonji examines the critical roles of Automated Teller Machines and Point of Sales terminals in achieving the cashless policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria, especially with the recent directives mandating banks to dispense new naira notes through ATMs

Table 5: Market Share in the e-Payment Market in 2008 - 2011

e-Payment	Volume (Millions)				Value (N ' Billion)			
Segment	2008	2009	2010	2011	2008	2009	2010	2011
ATM	60.1	109.6	186.2	347.6	399.7	548.6	954.0	1561.8
% of Total	91.0	95.3	95.1	97.9	9.5	85.0	88.9	93.4
Web (internet)	1.6	2.7	7.2	3.6	25.1	84.2	99.5	58.0
% of Total	2.4	2.3	3.7	1.0	5.7	13.1	9.3	3.5
POS	1.2	0.9	1.1	2.1	16.1	11.0	12.7	31.0
% of Total	1.8	0.8	0.6	0.6	3.7	1.7	1.2	1.9
Mobile	3.2	1.8	1.2	1.9	0.7	1.3	6.7	20.5
% of Total	4.8	1.6	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.6	1.2
TOTAL	66.1	115.0	195.7	355.2	441.6	645.1	1072.9	1671.4

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria Annual Report 2011



To consolidate the gains of its cashless policy, the Central bank of Nigeria (CBN), has mandated all Deposit Money Banks (DMBs) to begin the dispensing of new naira notes through ATMs. Although the banks have commenced implementation of the mandate, THISDAY investigation shows that there are more queues on bank ATMs for those who want to get a glimpse of the re-designed naira notes and need physical cash for their daily transactions.

The long queues however suggest that the available ATMs across banks may not be sufficient to service the growing number of bank customers in recent times. Banks, therefore, need to increase the number of their ATMs in order to reduce the queues and serve customers better. Again, the drive for digital banking service is compelling most banks to close their physical branches, while advising customers to embrace online digital services and to make use of alternative channels like ATMs, PoS, Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD), Mobile Banking, Online Banking, Internet Banking, among others for financial transactions.

Given renewed drive of the CBN to make Nigeria a cashless society, financial analysts are of the view that banks must devise new means of increasing the number of their ATMs, owing to its importance in driving a cashless economy. Analysts are also of the view that banks must intensify the drive for agency banking and ensure enough spread of PoS terminals in rural communities for a true cashless economy.

CASHLESS POLICY

To reduce the volume of cash in circulation and to promote electronic transactions in a digital economy, the Central Bank of Nigeria, in 2011, introduced the cashless policy in Nigeria, beginning with a few states, before expanding it to all states of the federation.

Determined to drive the cashless policy, and ensure seamless electronic transactions, the banks intensified the use of ATMs across all their branches, a development that led to the growth of ATMs and the sales of different brands of ATMs across Nigerian banks. In their resolve to make rural communities feel the impact of cashless economy, the banks also introduced agent banking in rural and underserved communities ensuring the widespread of PoS terminals. The introduction of agent banking, gave boost to the initiative, as agents were able to carry out electronic transactions and dispense cash through the PoS terminals to rural dwellers without banks in their communities.

Following the success of the cashless policy in 2012, the CBN, in November 2022, re-designed the naira note and in December 2022, announced the minimum cash withdrawal across the counter and from ATMs and PoS for individuals and corporate organisations. According to CBN, individuals are to withdraw not more than N500,000 per week, while corporate organisations will not be allowed to withdraw more than N5 million per week. The Apex bank placed a bank surcharge for any withdrawal above the limit. The CBN policy also mandates banks to dispense more of the N200 notes and to make use of ATMs in dispensing the new naira notes, a development that attaches importance to ATMs and PoS terminals.

GROWTH OF ATMS

Since the introduction of the CBN's cashless policy in 2011, ATMs have played a vital role in achieving the initiative. As at 2011, when the policy was introduced, the total number of ATMs across Nigerian banks was 10,000, but the number grew to 17,000 in 2015 and 18,000 in 2017, before reaching 22,500 across banks as of December 2022, according to recent statistics obtained by THISDAY. Although the growth from 10,000 in 2011 to 22,500 in December 2022 is phenomenal, the growing number of bank customers and the queues experienced at ATMs, suggest that the current 22,500 ATMs are insufficient to meet the cashless policy initiative of the CBN.

Another statistics obtained by THISDAY from CBN's website showed that in 2012, a year after the introduction of the policy, the total value of ATM transactions was 1.98 trillion and PoS was N48 billion. In 2013, the total value of ATM transactions increased to N2.8 trillion and PoS also increased to N161 billion. In 2014, the total value of ATM transactions increased to N3.6 trillion, while PoS also increased to N312 billion. In 2015, the total value of ATM transactions increased to N3.9 trillion while PoS also increased to N448 billion. In 2016, the total value of ATM transactions increased to N4.9 trillion, while PoS increase to N758 billion. In 2017, the total value of ATM transactions increased to N6.4 trillion and PoS transactions increased to N1.4 trillion. In 2018, the total value of ATM transactions was N6.5 trillion, while PoS was N2.4 trillion. In 2020, the total value of ATM transactions jumped to N12 trillion, with a corresponding increase in the total value of PoS transactions.

THISDAY research shows that in emerging markets where cash accounts for at least 80 percent of transactions and the annual rate of decline of cash is less than one percent, the growth in cash transaction volume and value coincides with growth in the number of ATMs.

THE DRIVING FACTORS

The growth in ATM installations across banks and the value of ATM transactions have been phenomenal since the introduction of the cashless policy in 2011. THISDAY research has however identified some of the driving factors that are responsible for the growth.

According to the research, Inlaks, a leading ICT infrastructure, and systems integrator in sub-Saharan Africa was one of the pioneer companies that started with the sale of Hyosung brand of ATMs in Nigeria, with just two bank customers and a market share of less than 300 units as of 2012. At that time, other technology companies were promoting the NCR and Wincor brands of ATM machines in Nigeria, with NCR having the largest market share of ATMs across Nigerian banks, driven by a Nigerian Fintech sales guru, Mr. Tope Dare who joined NCR in 2010, after disengaging from Oceanic Bank Plc (now EcoBank).

Dare was able to grow the ATM business in Nigeria for two years and six months when he worked with NCR, where he sold over 3,500 ATMs out of the 7,000 ATMs currently controlled by NCR in the Nigerian market. He grew the market share of NCR from 44 per cent to 46 per cent within that period. He later disengaged from NCR in December, 2012 when NCR was leading the ATM market in Nigeria with over 7,000 distributed and installed ATMs.

He joined Inlaks in January 2013 as a Director in charge of E-Business and Infrastructure, when Inlaks partnered Hyosung to promote the brand of ATM in Nigeria, with less than 300 units installed in the Nigerian market, which was less than one per cent market share of the ATM business.

From 2013, Dare grew the Inlaks' market share with the Hyosung brand to over 11,500 units as of today in just 10 years corresponding to a market share of 51 per cent as of December 2022. The rise in Inlaks' market share, placed the company as the leader in ATM sales and distribution in Nigeria as of December 2022 and NCR dropped to number two with 26 per cent market share with less than 6,000 ATMs. Inlaks moved from covering just two banks in 2013 to covering virtually all banks in Nigeria in 2023, a growth strategy that was driven by Tope Dare, using the Hyosung brand that was once perceived as an unknown brand in Nigeria. In 10 years, Dare sold over 11, 000 ATMs, as banks continued to demand for the Hyosung brand. He has expanded the Inlaks' ATM business from Nigeria to Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea, DR Congo, Zambia, and Gambia. In November 2022, Dare was awarded the Fintech Salesman of the Year at the Nigerian Fintech Awards in recognition of his contributions to the industry towards over the decade promoting the deployment of ATMs and many innovations to enhance the customers' experience on self-service terminals.

Giving details of his strategies in growing the Hyosung brand of ATM at Inlaks, Dare told THISDAY that the winning approaches were based on Inlaks' philosophy– 'putting the customer first'. According to him, his business acumen for the demonstration of insight into ATM business, issues, and industry trends relevant to customers, including the selling price, unique features, and functionalities of the Hyosung brand that are designed with a high focus on customers' needs and pain points per time to drive innovation, have helped him in driving sales of ATMs in Nigeria.

"Value creation through my ability to instill demand for ATMs and other services by identifying, tracking, and measuring customer business value is important. Another strategy being adopted is empathy and customer intimacy, which result in the co-creation of products with customers. The Inlaks core values such as Innovation, Professionalism, Excellence, Adaptability and Customer Centricity (IPEAC), including reliable products and partnering with a responsive Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), are also some strong factors in the success story of the growth of the Hyosung, making it the most preferred ATM brand in Nigeria," Dare said.

ATM SUPPORT

According to Dare, Nigeria like other countries such as India, Mexico, South Africa, Indonesia, and Morocco, belong to the emerging markets in cash usage where cash accounts for at least 80 percent of transactions and the annual rate of decline of cash is less than one percent.

"In Nigeria, growth in cash transaction volume and value coincides with growth in branch and ATM networks. The total number of ATMs in Nigeria has always been insufficient for the huge population size of the country. The recent CBN policies have further emphasized the need for more ATMs to be deployed to service the massive under-banked and unbanked population in the country.

As such, the 22,500 ATMs installed in Nigeria by all the banks are still grossly insufficient to serve the needs of the population of more than 200 million citizens of which 52 million are banked with BVN," Dare said.

Reacting to CBN's order which mandates banks to dispense re-designed notes through ATM machines, Dare said: "Getting the bank's ATMs to dispense the newly redesigned notes is not an issue at all. On the part of Inlaks, the unparalleled support we give to the ATM custodians has greatly assisted them to maintain the much-needed ATM uptime to serve their customers. Inlaks has a footprint of over 200 field engineers across all 36 states of the country as such our response time to attend to customers' requests is efficient." Over the years, we have equally invested heavily on setting up ATM repair and spares storage centers in Lagos, Kano, Abuja, Ibadan, Enugu and Port Harcourt to improve on our distribution and logistics operations.

According to him, ATMs will continue to play a pivotal role in driving cashless policy.

"The recent CBN directive to all DMBs directing them to suspend over-the-counter pay-out of new notes and mandating them to use ATM channels is enough indication of the future role of ATMs in promoting the adoption of cashless policy.

In spite of the cashless policy of the government, the need for cash is still relevant in Nigeria, as such, the ATM business will continue to thrive through efficient management and innovations that are more customer and mobile-centric. As long as cash is king, the need for ATMs will continue to be inevitable in Nigeria," Dare further said.

BANK'S CHOICE OF ATM

From 2013 to date, THISDAY research shows that all the new generation banks that have come into the Nigerian market, ranging from Heritage Bank, TAJ Bank, Globus Bank, Providus Bank, SunTrust Bank, Parallex Bank, Lotus Bank, Premium Trust Bank, Titan Trust Bank, Optimus Bank and Signature Bank, use the Hyosung brand of ATM 100 per cent patronage. This is in addition to the old-generation banks that have pitched their tents with the Hyosung brand of ATM, which Dare has vigorously driven through the Inlaks' platform, to become the number one ATM brand in Nigeria.

Mitigating Food Insecurity in 2023

With the recent Global Hunger Index in which Nigeria is ranked 103 out of 121 countries, and with the National Bureau of Statistics estimating that 133 million Nigerians are multi-dimensionally poor with food as one of the indicators, Nigeria is no doubt at risk, writes **Ugo Aliogo**

Nearly 25 million Nigerians are at risk of facing hunger between June and August 2023, if urgent action is not taken, according to the October 2022 Cadre Harmonisé, a government led and UN-supported food and nutrition analysis carried out twice a year.

The report stated that this is a projected increase from the estimated 17 million people currently at risk of food insecurity. Continued conflict, climate change, inflation and rising food prices are key drivers of this alarming trend. Food access has been affected by persistent violence in the north-east states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) and armed banditry and kidnapping in states such as Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, Benue and Niger.

According to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), widespread flooding in the 2022 rainy season damaged more than 676,000 hectares of farmlands, which diminished harvests and increased the risk of food insecurity for families across the country. The flooding is one of the effects of climate change and variability impacting Nigeria. More extreme weather patterns affecting food security are anticipated in the future.

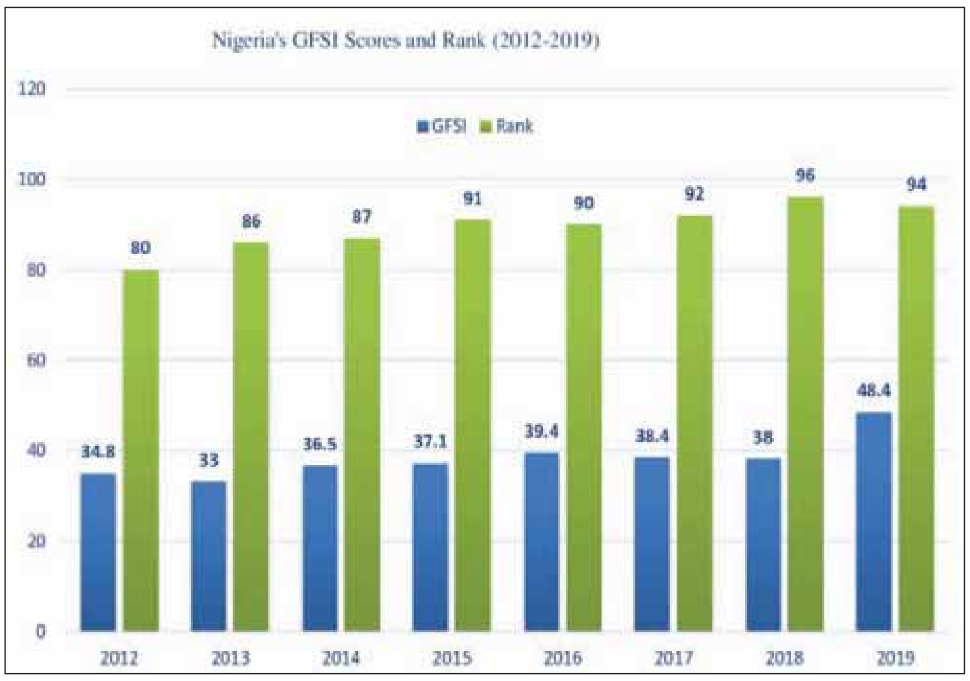
Of the 17 million people who are currently food insecure, 3 million are in the northeast BAY states. Without immediate action, this figure is expected to increase to 4.4 million in the lean season. This includes highly vulnerable displaced populations and returnees who are already struggling to survive a large-scale humanitarian crisis in which 8.3 million people need assistance.

Reacting to the development, the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria, Mr. Matthias Schmale, said: "The food security and nutrition situation across Nigeria is deeply concerning. I have visited nutrition stabilization centres filled with children who are fighting to stay alive. We must act now to ensure they and others get the lifesaving support they need."

The report argued that Children are the most vulnerable to food insecurity. Approximately 6 of the 17 million food-insecure Nigerians today are children under 5 living in Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara states. There is a serious risk of mortality among children attributed to acute malnutrition. In the BAY states alone, the number of children suffering from acute malnutrition is expected to increase from 1.74 million in 2022 to 2 million in 2023.

The report revealed that UNICEF, working with the government and partners such as MSF and ALIMA, is investing in scaling up preventive nutrition interventions, while ensuring that vulnerable children have access to life-saving nutrition services. In 2022, UNICEF with partners was able to reach approximately 650,000 children with life-saving nutrition services across the six states mentioned above.

The report noted that the northwest region, around Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto states, is an increasing food insecurity and malnutrition hotspot. An estimated 2.9 million people are currently critically food insecure (Cadre Harmonisé Phase 3 or worse.) This figure is projected to increase to 4.3 million in the lean season if urgent action is not taken.



FOOD INSECURITY IN 2023

With the recent Global Hunger Index in which Nigeria is ranked 103rd out of 121, and the government-controlled National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) estimating that 133 million Nigerians are multi-dimensionally poor with food as one of the indicators.

In his reaction, the Country Director, PLAN International, Mr. Usie Emmamuzou, said there was an urgent need for the government both at the federal and State level respectively to consider the looming crisis an emergency, adding that this is urgent not just in relation to hunger, but also in terms of economic development.

He explained that where a sector generating about 24 percent of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in one year is under threat, government at all levels should prioritize an urgent response and classify the situation as a national crisis.

He urged government to take urgent steps to stop the forecasted catastrophic events by addressing all challenges and threats, which are institutional issues and man-made difficulties.

"First is the issue of access to support and financing by the smallholder farmers who are responsible for 90 percent of Nigeria's agricultural produce and about 98 per cent of food consumed in Nigerian homes, with the exception of wheat. Also, the government, as a matter of urgency, needs to now devise a workable response to the various violent conflicts and invasions that have chased farmers off the farmlands across the country. Ensuring that farmers find their way back to their farms and are safe there should be a priority now. Therefore, the government should ensure the roads are safe, the forests free of criminals and access to agricultural input is made possible," he said.

In his remarks, the Executive Director, Civil Society Legislative and Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) Auwal Rafsanjani, said one of the key responsibilities of a government is to ensure the adequate welfare of the citizens, adding that food security is one dimension of welfare that every responsible government must focus on in delivering to its citizens.

INSECURITY AND SUFFICIENCY

The Director, Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprises, (CPPE), Dr. Muda Yusuf, is of the view that the federal government needs to tackle the issue of insecurity which is affecting the agricultural sector, thereby reducing the agricultural output, led to displacement of millions of Nigerians, and it has contributed greatly to poverty in the country.

He explained that the agricultural sector is a critical sector because it is biggest employer of labour in the country, therefore with such sector is severely affected by insecurity, it means that it would have huge implications for food and poverty.

Yusuf maintained that insecurity and its impact on our agriculture sector is something that needs to be tackled, pointing out that this can bring some solution from the point of view of improving level of employment in our agricultural sector, which would now ensure that access to food and increase in the capacity to buy the food.

He remarked that if insecurity is tackled, the country would experience increase in agricultural output, and if output increases, prices are likely to drop, noting that if prices drop, affordability would increase, which would to reduce the problem of food insecurity in the country.

According to him, "What is very clear is that the food crisis has been worsened by the rising cost of food. There are global factors, but in our case, there are domestic factors. The second thing that needs to be done is to address the macro-economic issues especially factors that are driving food inflation. Presently, most families cannot afford protein in their meals because of the cost of chicken, fish and beef is expensive. Therefore there is need to manage the macro-economic environment in a way to reduce inflation is very important. Government can do this by looking at the macro-economic policies, the level of our fiscal deficit, looking at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) injection of liquidity into the economy. All the macro-economy issues fuelling inflation needs to be addressed at a policy level so that inflation and food malnutrition generally will drop."

FIXING THE CHALLENGE

Rafsanjani stated that some of the major steps that the government must take in order to address the problem of food insecurity is to go back to the basics and truly prioritizes food production, employ the services of more advanced techniques and technologies that would meet the needs of the 21st century farming for efficient, and robust food production, build more agricultural facilities across the country.

His viewpoint is that there is need to abandon some bad policies that are not doing the country any good and adopt policies that best serve the interests and aspirations of Nigeria and Nigerians.

According to him, "The need for the government to truly engage the citizens in value reorientation in terms of the goals, vision and aspirations of Nigeria as a self-sufficient, self-reliant country that will cater for its growing population without much dependence on others for food. For example, according to an account by Africa research review, past efforts at improving food supply through agricultural production has not yielded successful results. The programmes that were introduced only helped to alienate peasant farmers who are the major producers of food in Nigeria.

"All the companies that had something to do with food production in the country are now dead and the government is doing nothing to revive the legacies of these companies because of misplaced priorities and inconsistency in government policies that will serve the interests of the people. Companies such as the National Grains Companies, National Root Crops Production Companies, North east, Western and National and Livestock Production Companies, Nigerian National Fish Company."

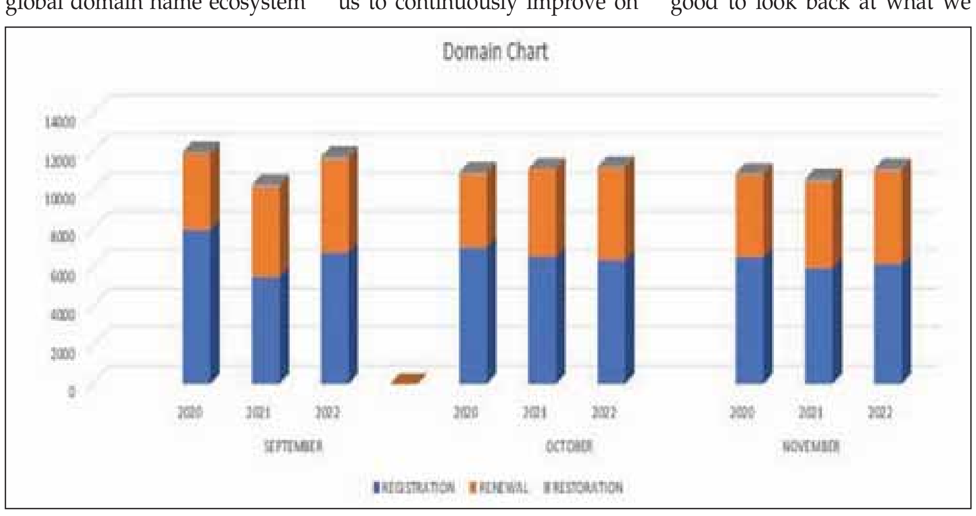
The CPPE Director revealed that most of the farm inputs are expensive because they are imported and that is affecting the cost of food, livestock and productions.

The story continues online on
www.thisdaylive.com

AGAIN, NIGERIA'S DOMAIN NAME USERS INCREASED FROM 181,275 IN SEPTEMBER TO 183,169 IN NOVEMBER 2022

reliability of the .ng domain name. To achieve this, we keep abreast of the latest developments in the global domain name ecosystem by engaging with stakeholders from various sectors across Africa and the world. The onus lies on us to continuously improve on our results and surpass our own expectations."

According to Rudman, "It feels good to look back at what we have achieved in disseminating information about the growth of .ng domains and providing insight as to the impact of our work on the nation at large. The overall thrust of our efforts has been to increase the adoption of .ng domain names. Without a doubt, we still have a lot to do this year, but we are closer to the achievement of our strategic goals than we have ever been."



DOMAIN COUNT AT A GLANCE

DESCRIPTION		SEPTEMBER 2020	SEPTEMBER 2021	SEPTEMBER 2022	OCTOBER 2020	OCTOBER 2021	OCTOBER 2022	NOVEMBER 2020	NOVEMBER 2021	NOVEMBER 2022
REGISTRATION		7,939	5,498	6,781	7,031	6,580	6,388	6,531	5,973	6,177
RENEWAL		3,970	4,656	4,837	3,842	4,551	4,773	4,291	4,489	4,861
RESTORATION		118	164	153	93	25	95	91	141	101
ACTIVE DOMAINS	3RD LEVEL	151,183	127,423	105,400	152,869	135,849	103,279	150,948	129,930	101,562
	2ND LEVEL	19,946	45,364	75,875	19,843	48,492	78,704	24,123	51,602	81,607
GRAND TOTAL		171,129	172,787	181,275	172,712	184,341	181,983	175,071	181,532	183,169

TELECOM SUBSCRIPTIONS MAINTAIN STEADY GROWTH, HIT 222 MILLION IN DECEMBER

and with a subscriber base of 60,290,012 on its network. This is closely followed by Airtel, with a market share of 27.03 per cent, and a subscriber base of 60,065,904 on its network. 9mobile has a market share of 5.78 per cent, with a subscriber base of 12,852,706 on its network.

Commenting on the growth of telecom subscriptions in the last one year, the Chairman, Association of Licensed Telecom Operators of Nigeria (ALTON), Gbenga Adebayo, told THISDAY that the launch of 5G network last year by MTN, coupled with the various customer-friendly promotions carried out by network operators, contributed to the steady growth telecom subscriptions in 2022. He also said the policy direction of NCC, contributed immensely in helping telecom operators to achieve tremendous growth last year.

L-R: Senior Special Assistant to the President on Education Interventions, Mr. Fela-Bank- Olemoh; Edo State Commissioner for Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Diaspora Affairs, Bamidele Obaitan; Edo State Commissioner of Education, Dr. Joan Oviawe; Head of Projects, GIZ-SKYE, Mr. Tobias Wolfgarten and the Managing Director, Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO), Mr. Kelvin Uwaibi, at the Edo State Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Conference held in Benin City... recently

Edo Introduces Digital Learning to Technical, Vocational Schools, Partners UNICEF, Others

The Edo State Government has restated its commitment towards repositioning technical and vocational education in the state, noting that the government has partnered with the United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF) and other collaborators to introduce digital learning into technical and vocational schools across the state.

The Edo State Commissioner for Education, Dr. Joan Osa Oviawe, disclosed this while delivering her welcome address at the two-day Edo State Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Conference held in Benin City, with the theme, "How Can State and Non-State Actors Promote Demand-Driven Quality TVET?"

The Commissioner said the Governor Godwin Obaseki-led state government is taking critical steps to reform the TVET sub-sector in Edo State, reassuring that the construction of the 20 new TVET schools across the state's 18 local councils will begin this year.

According to her, "We have introduced digital learning into our TVET schools in partnership with UNICEF and Nigerian Learning Passport. We are using two schools as a pilot phase, namely Benin Technical College and Usugbenu Technical College, Irrua. The goal is to ensure that all our TVET students are digitally literate.

"As part of the ongoing reforms of our TVET sub-sector by our board, we have identified about 17 industries from oil and gas to the creative industries, among others that we want to train our young people for. Going forward, it's going to be about practicals and skills.

"Skills come in different forms. The government plans to establish 20 new TVET schools across the 18 Local Government Areas of the State and the construction will begin this year."

She further noted, "Our board of TVET is serious about working with our master craftsmen and women and the private sector to start formalizing the non-formal apprenticeship sector. If we are able to formalize our informal sector, it's going to be beneficial to our youths."

"On Thursday this week, under the World Bank and Federal Ministry of Education IDEAS program, we are going to be launching a N300m innovation grant for the South-South region. This innovation grant is targeted at small companies in the digital sector to train our young people."

In his goodwill message, Senior Education Specialist at World Bank, Dr. Tunde Adekola, congratulated Edo State Government, GIZ-SKYE, and other partners for the conference, assuring of the World Bank's support to promote and develop technical and vocational education in the state.

Taeps Presents 3D Animation to Boost Learning in Schools, Families

Emma Okonji

Taeps Animation Studios, at the weekend in Lagos, presented a 3D animation film called 'Ewa', created to enhance digital learning in schools, families and among adults who have passion for animation.

'Ewa', which was created by a team of young Nigerians, was designed to tell the Nigerian and African stories, through 3D animation that is combined with digital technology.

Speaking at the film presentation, which attracted audiences from the animation, entertainment and arts industries, the CEO, Taeps Animation Studios, Mr. Adeoyin Okuboyejo, said 'Ewa' which resonates with Nigerian staple food, was created to tell the story of a young Nigerian kid called Ranti, who is faced with the dilemma of achieving his desires of growing taller before the next school year.

According to him, "The primary target audience is between ages 5-26 years, the secondary target audience is the family, while the others are those adults that enjoy animation. For the primary audience who are still of school age, we plan to do a school tour to showcase 'Ewa' to school authorities. We believe it will help pupils and students of that age to learn faster, when they are exposed with study that combines animation with digital technology.

"The combination of animation with technology is all about digital technology that is currently driving learning across the globe. Ewa is about using computer animation to develop students learning skills and achieve their goals in their chosen careers. What we did was to use 3D animation, which is a combination of computer hardware and software to create moving pictures that will make learning more interesting and more of a fun."

Explaining what motivated the team into creating the 3D animation, Okuboyejo said: "Our team is passionate about using animation to tell the African story and how such story can impact learning. There are lots of foreign animations in our environment, including our schools, but none tells the African story. So Taeps Animation Studios developed Ewa, using the 3D animation to tell the ambition of a school boy called Ranti who has an ambition to grow tall and was supported by the encouragement from his mother and a bean that were always by him."

Taeps Animation Studios is a media and entertainment company aimed at creating high quality African stories. It aspires to bring to screen, compelling storytelling through animated content that is relatable, entertaining and educative to a global audience, which is reflected in the production of 'Ewa', produced in 3D animation and stellar 4k, making it the first of its kind in Nigeria.

Interswitch Secures CBN's Payment Service Holding Company License

Nosa Alekhuogie

Interswitch Group one of Africa's leading financial technology and integrated payments solution providers has announced receipt of a Payments Service Holding Company (PSHC) License issued by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

This follows an earlier announcement by the CBN regarding new licensing categories for participants in the Nigerian Payments System.

By virtue of the development, which was formally communicated on Friday, January 13, 2023 by the apex bank, Interswitch essentially becomes one of the inaugural licensees by the CBN in this category.

According to the regulator, the PSHC regulation requires companies with existing or prospective operations across multiple license categories to set up a payments service holding company (PSHC). The activities of each of the PSHC subsidiaries operating within those respective licensing regimes are clearly delineated, for clearer accountability, effective risk management and the enablement of better regulatory oversight by the CBN.

The statement from Interswitch also outlines that Interswitch's Group Holding Company retains ownership of the PSHC in Nigeria as well as its other subsidiaries outside of Africa.

Konga's Upcoming Mentorship Session Excites Customer

Nosa Alekhuogie

Mrs. Molayo Jebutu, one of the customers of Konga, Nigeria's leading composite e-commerce giant, selected for the all-expense paid Knowledge Weekend programme with the Chairman, Zinox Group, Leo Stan Ekeh, has expressed her excitement and expectations from the exclusive mentorship session.

Jebutu, who confessed to be an ardent and loyal shopper on Konga, was one of the first batch of winners unveiled by the e-commerce company for the highly anticipated mentorship programme scheduled to hold in February next month.

"I was excited after being contacted by Konga and subsequently being informed of my selection. I am looking forward to a very interesting programme. I expect to be able to expand my network, gain more knowledge on business management from Mr. Leo Stan Ekeh and have fun," she said.

Awodiji: Additional 125 Megawatts Expected by End of Q1 2023

Oluchi Chibuzor

The Managing Director of TILT Energy, Mr. Deji Awodiji, has stated that Nigeria is expected to increase her power capacity with an additional 125 Megawatts to the national grid with the completion of the Olorunsogo Power Plant by the Niger Delta Power Holding Company by end of first quarter (Q1) 2023.

TILT Energy is the company handling the Olorunsogo power plant project for Niger Delta Power Holding Company.

Awodiji disclosed in Lagos during the commissioning of the NNPC Gas Marketing Limited (NGML) gas distribution office, in Ikeja, Lagos, recently.

According to him, "Once we're done with that project, we expect about 125 megawatts extra to be added to the grid from the steam turbine alone, which we are working on. We're fixing the steam turbine of the Olorunsogo power plant. We've been working on that for a couple of years. And we are nearing completion within the first quarter of this year."

He said also that the Olorunsogo Power Plant project is a very significant milestone for a local company to execute working with strategic partners like Schneider Electric.

Speaking further, Awodiji said the project shows the pedigree of a company, "not just to be able to do construction projects of this standard but to be able to work in the oil and gas industry, with their safety standards.

"TILT Energy has a very strong fabrication base and process automation. We're proud to have been part of many flagship projects, including this," he said.

He asserted that TILT Energy would continue to show its capacity to work in a live site and where you have gas distribution.

3 YEARS AGO TODAY WE LOST A VERY SPECIAL SISTER

Jenny,

As the world changes from year to year, our lives from day to day, the life and memory of you shall never pass away. What has become clear is that the hardest part of losing someone isn't having to say goodbye but learning how to live without them. We are however gladdened that your legacy continues to live on today through our brother, your dear husband Thomas, your children Emmanuel, Yusuf, David, Daniel and your foundation, The Jennifer Etuh Foundation which this year is commissioning the 3rd Hospital and Medical Center in Ifewara Osun State as part of the 6 to be built nationwide in your honour. We continue to pray for them and for you that the Almighty grants you eternal rest in heaven as you were truly an angle. We miss you dearly but are comforted with the knowledge you are in a better place.

Continue to Rest in Perfect Peace.

Abé & Amina Ibraheem

MRS JENNIFER RAMATU ETUH

Jul 10, 1974 - Jan 26, 2020

You have never left our memory one day and we can truly never forget you. Everyday there is a remembrance of instructions and counsels you gave on various issues. We have all resolved to portray the ideals you lived for. Loving, kindness. simplicity, openness and fear of God.

We have been blessed having you as a wife and mother. Our prayer is that you will continue to rest in Peace with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ

Sleep on beloved of God

Thomas (husband) **Emmanuel, Yusuf, David & Daniel** (children)

MRS JENNIFER RAMATU ETUH

Jul 10, 1974 - Jan 26, 2020

■ JENNIFER ETUH FOUNDATION ■

Three years ago today, you passed on to glory to be with the Lord. Though away from us , your memories linger on in our hearts. We are continuing to deliver on the legacies you left behind, knowing that you would have done same with all your heart and zest, were you still here with us.

The third of the six hospital projects you had planned, before your journey to your Creator, will be commissioned at Ifewara in two weeks, to the Glory of God .

Continue your peaceful rest in Gods bosom.

JENNIFER ETUH
FOUNDATION

Naira Redesign: Nobody Will Be Harassed for Returning Old Banknotes, Emefiele Assures

James Emejo in Abuja

The Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Mr. Godwin Emefiele, yesterday said no one will be harassed by the anti-graft agencies for depositing the old naira notes following the recent currency redesign.

The old naira notes will cease to be legal tender after January 31, 2023.

Addressing journalists after the two-day meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in Abuja, the CBN governor said he had pleaded with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to allow people to deposit the old naira notes in their banks without harassment.

Emefiele said, "By last week, we had seen close to about N1.3 trillion to N1.5 trillion in. We are hoping that as we get into this week, we would move closer to N2 trillion. If we get N2 trillion in and those who decide to keep it in vaults decide to keep it in their homes, I am not going to force them to bring it out because they've been waiting. And I don't know what else I am going to do to beg them to bring it.

"But if they don't bring it, by January 31, it will be useless in their hands. So, I can only just beg them to please, bring it. We will take it on or before January 31st. "

He said, "Bring it, nobody is going to harass you. If you are afraid of being harassed, trust me, I have begged EFCC, and we have begged ICPC that they should please, allow us to do our work so that people will bring money in.

So, we are begging them to bring it in and nothing will happen to you on my honour."

Emefiele said, "Before we came on with the new naira design, we said that in 2015, currency in circulation was N1.42 trillion. In 2022, currency in circulation had grown to N3.23 trillion more than double.

Out of the N3.2 trillion, about N1.7 trillion was outside the vaults of banks. This has made the efficacy of monetary policy to be difficult for the monetary policy committees because what you would have expected is that when currency is issued, it will circulate and after some time, the old and worn-out ones would be returned back to CBN.

"So, if the old and worn-out notes return back to CBN, there is no reason currency in circulation will grow from N1.4 trillion to N3.23 trillion in seven years."

He said, "People are hoarding it; people are keeping vaults in their homes and we cannot allow them to become banks in their homes. They don't have a license to build bank vaults in their homes."

'Lekki Port will Revolutionise Nigeria's Maritime Industry'

Gilbert Ekugbe

Promoter of the Lekki Deep Sea Port, Lekki Port LFTZ Enterprise has stated that the Lekki Port will revolutionise maritime activities in Nigeria, noting that with the commissioning of the port recently by President Muhammadu Buhari, the port would facilitate trade volume growth and increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country.

The Managing Director of Lekki Port LFTZ Enterprise Limited (LPLEL), Mr. Du Ruogang, on the sidelines of the commissioning of the port said noted that Lekki Port remains a game-changer that would redefine maritime activities in Nigeria and the entire West African sub-region as its full operations scheduled to commence by the end of Q1 2023.

He highlighted other benefits to include; improvement of external trade competitiveness through improved port efficiency, cost-effective port operations & services, and improved turnaround time for cargo handling and clearance, a reduction in delays in the supply of raw materials and equipment, as well as reduced costs of importations and charges such as demurrage, among others.

"With Lekki Port, Nigeria will witness a growth in maritime traffic and global trade and strengthen connectivity and capability to provide efficient and reliable services. Lekki Port, no doubt, will be a critical engine that will drive the Nigerian economy upon commencement of operations, "he said.

The CEO of Lekki Freeport Terminal, operated by CMA Terminals, a subsidiary of the CMA CGM Group, Mr. Denrick Moos, highlighted that in addition to its state-of-the-art infrastructure, Lekki Port will become a new generation container terminal, a game changing infrastructure in Nigeria and West Africa, saying that the Port is Nigeria's first deep sea port and is equipped with 13 quay cranes for a capacity of 2.5 million Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) on a 1.2 kilometre quay with a depth of 16 meters and expected to operate vessels with a capacity of up to 15,000 TEUs and become one of the largest in West Africa.

Speaking at the event, the Executive Governor of Lagos State, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu, noted that the project is a big testament to the commitment of the Lagos State Government to support the provision of necessary infrastructure that would improve the economic fortunes of Lagosians by providing thousands of jobs for the people and impacting their lives positively.

On his part, the Chairman of Lekki Port, Mr. Biodun Dabiri, expressed profound gratitude to the President and his team for giving all the necessary backing that ensured the project came to fruition. He stressed that the Management of the Port is working round-the-clock to get the port operational soon.

"We owe a great deal of this success to the visionary leadership of President Buhari, who provided the much-needed support to make the project a reality. We are immensely grateful to President Buhari, Governor Sanwo-Olu, and all other stakeholders for their role in the actualization of the Port. For us, we would continue to be a willing partner in the quest to achieve significant economic growth by investing in Nigeria," Dabiri said.

Devon Introduces Low-Fat Spread

Devon King's, known for its locally produced, internationally-acclaimed cooking oil, under the PZ Wilmar family, has recently launched a new product into the FMCG industry, Devon King's Low-Fat Spread, curating the uniqueness of its brand positioning as the taste that binds. The Devon King's Low-Fat Spread was unveiled on Thursday, January 12th, at the Darlington Hall, Ilupeju, Lagos.

According to the Head of Marketing, PZ Wilmar, Chioma Mbanugo, "at Devon King's, our purpose is to keep consumers healthy and happy with great tasting, nutritious products, enriched with vitamins and provide consumers with incredible creaminess, building on the excellent taste that binds. Now, we are excited to launch a new member into the Devon King's family, the Devon King's Low-Fat Spread which comes in a creamy texture and gives that yummy buttery taste for a delightful breakfast and bites like bread, biscuits, crackers and snacks." Chioma said

"We prioritize areas such as easy accessibility and affordability for Devon King's brand, therefore, the Devon King's Low-Fat Spread has been produced, and distributed in various economical packs to meet needs of various social class, despite urbanization, rapid increase in population, indulgence and a growing number of confectionery establishments emerging across the country", Chioma added

Also speaking about the newest addition to the Devon King's family, Brand Manager, Devon King's, Mandela Ajuebor said it is the brand's goal to continuously drive the message of bonding and the importance of bonding and togetherness.

MARKET INDICATORS

MONEY AND CREDIT STATISTICS (MILLION NAIRA)

	AUGUST 2022
Money Supply (M3)	49,356,443.6
-- CBN Bills Held by Money Holding Sectors	50,601.36
Money Supply (M2)	49,305,842.3
-- Quasi Money	27,869,678.3
-- Narrow Money (M1)	21,436,164
---- Currency Outside Banks	2,680,236.81
---- Demand Deposits	18,755,927.2
Net Foreign Assets (NFA)	5,074,909.92
Net Domestic Assets(NDA)	27,869,678.3
-- Net Domestic Credit (NDC)	61,195,142.4
---- Credit to Government (Net)	21,001,401.5
---- Memo: Credit to Govt. (Net) less FMA	0.00
---- Memo: Fed. and Mirror Accounts (FMA)	0.00
---- Credit to Private Sector (CPS)	40,193,740.9
--Other Assets Net	6,785,979.22
Reserve Money (Base Money	14,040,351.9
--Currency in Circulation	3,210,664.98
--Banks Reserves	10,829,686.9
--Special Intervention Reserves	390,557.8

• Source - CBN

Money Market Indicators (in Percentage)

Month	July 2022
Inter-Bank Call Rate	13.00
Minimum Rediscount Rate (MRR)	
Monetary Policy Rate (MPR)	14.00
Treasury Bill Rate	2.76
Savings Deposit Rate	1.42
1 Month Deposit Rate	3.64
3 Months Deposit Rate	4.96
6 Months Deposit Rate	5.87
12 Months Deposit Rate	5.76
Prime Lending rate	12.10
Maximum Lending Rate	27.61

• Monetary Policy Rate - 13%

OPEC DAILY BASKET PRICE AS AT 24 OCTOBER, 2022

The price of OPEC basket of thirteen crudes stood at $92.17 a barrel on Monday, compared with $92.09 the previous Friday, according to OPEC Secretariat calculations.
The OPEC Reference Basket of Crudes (ORB) is made up of the following: Saharan Blend (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Djeno (Congo), Zafiro (Equatorial Guinea), Rabi Light (Gabon), Iran Heavy (Islamic Republic of Iran), Basrah Medium (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (UAE) and Merey (Venezuela).

MARKET NEWS

Popoola: NGX to Launch USSD Integrated Payment System

Kayode Tokede

The chief executive officer, Nigerian Exchange Limited (NGX), Mr. Temi Popoola yesterday disclosed the Exchange plan to launch an Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) to unlock Africa's capital markets payment system through collaboration with telecommunication companies and banks.

Speaking at a virtual event with theme: the 2022 Market Recap and 2023 Outlook, Popoola said the adoption of USSD will further simplify the continent's capital markets through integration with Afreximbank's Pan African payment settlement system. He added that the Exchange is targeting the development of new products aimed at attracting the lower rung of the Nigerian demography.

According to him, "NGX is also focused on increasing youth participation with the creation of digital asset products powered by Blockchain technology, non-depository receipts and overall increasing the pool of available liquidity in the market.

"On strategic partnerships, we will be forging more with development finance institutions, and banks, both local and international to further develop the market. We aim to do more on trading where we improve data dissemination to attract a more extensive investor base, especially from the retail side.

"We will be using listings as a vehicle for meeting strategic aspirations as the new dispensation come in through increased advocacy and engagements.

"NGX sees sustainability as not just important but also a profitable frontier of its business. Work is ongoing on developing a framework for certifications in carbon credits trading, pending regulatory approval.

"Altogether, 2023 is likely to be a new dawn for the market and the Nigerian economy as significant events take shape in the macroeconomic and political environments."

On the 2022 market recap, he noted that the bullish run witnessed in the year might have been partly induced by the N4.3trillion in listings recorded by NGX across equities and fixed-income markets.

He added that the raising of N2.54trillion of bond listings for the Federal Government of Nigeria, as well as equity listings totaling N1.35trillion from companies such as BUA Foods Plc and Geregu Power Plc had a significant impact on the overall market performance.

The NGX boss emphasised that the value of the listings showed the local bourse's commitment to positioning itself as a premier location for raising capital and its ability to facilitate a wide range of transactions and attract a diverse range of businesses demonstrated its position as a leader in financial market innovation and progress on the African continent.

PRICES FOR SECURITIES TRADED ASOF 25/01/23

MAIN BOARD		DEALS	MARKET PRICE		QUANTITY TRADED	VALUE TRADED (N)
FINANCIAL SERVICES						
S/N	BANKING	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
1	UNITED BANK FOR AFRICA PLC	277,015.31	8.10	-2.41 ↓	148	3,445,217
2	ZENITH BANK PLC	770,783.92	24.50	0.20 ↑	213	4,766,720
BANKING					361	8,211,937
S/N	OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
3	ACCESS HOLDINGS PLC	319,907.03	9.00	-0.55 ↓	114	1,613,666
4	FBN HOLDINGS PLC	419,974.93	11.70	-0.43 ↓	140	7,690,248
OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS					254	9,303,914
FINANCIAL SERVICES					615	17,515,851
ICT						
S/N	TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
5	MTN NIGERIA COMMUNICATIONS PLC	4,661,183.49	229.00	-0.43 ↓	140	2,277,522
TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES					140	2,277,522
ICT					140	2,277,522
INDUSTRIAL GOODS						
S/N	BUILDING MATERIALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
6	DANGOTE CEMENT PLC	4,548,111.43	266.90	- →	55	94,633
7	LAFARGE AFRICA PLC.	397,057.16	24.65	0.20 ↑	71	1,332,256
BUILDING MATERIALS					126	1,426,889
INDUSTRIAL GOODS					126	1,426,889
OIL AND GAS						
S/N	EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
8	SEPLAT ENERGY PLC	647,289.02	1,100.00	- →	4	123
EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION					4	123
OIL AND GAS					4	123
AGRICULTURE						
S/N	CROP PRODUCTION	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
9	ELLAH LAKES PLC.	7,920.00	3.96	- →	0	0
10	FTN COCOA PROCESSORS PLC	660.00	0.30	3.45 ↑	9	864,704
11	OKOMU OIL PALM PLC.	172,753.10	181.10	9.76 ↑	32	178,160
12	PRESCO PLC	150,800.00	150.80	- →	63	175,994
CROP PRODUCTION					104	1,218,858
S/N	LIVESTOCK/ANIMAL SPECIALTIES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
13	LIVESTOCK FEEDS PLC.	3,240.00	1.08	-1.82 ↓	23	2,059,228
LIVESTOCK/ANIMAL SPECIALTIES					23	2,059,228
AGRICULTURE					127	3,278,086
CONGLOMERATES						
S/N	DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
14	CUSTODIAN INVESTMENT PLC	35,291.19	6.00	- →	18	1,155,350
15	JOHN HOLT PLC.	428.07	1.10	- →	12	19,681
16	S C O A NIG. PLC.	597.84	0.92	- →	9	71,128
17	TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATION PLC	49,590.55	1.22	-0.81 ↓	88	8,751,948
18	U A C N PLC.	29,407.62	10.05	- →	25	205,046
DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIES					152	10,203,153
CONGLOMERATES					152	10,203,153
CONSTRUCTION/REAL ESTATE						
S/N	BUILDING CONSTRUCTION	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
19	ARBICO PLC.	152.96	1.03	- →	0	0
BUILDING CONSTRUCTION					0	0
S/N	INFRASTRUCTURE/HEAVY CONSTRUCTION	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
20	JULIUS BERGER NIG. PLC.	39,200.00	24.50	- →	24	87,477
INFRASTRUCTURE/HEAVY CONSTRUCTION					24	87,477
S/N	REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
21	UPDC PLC	17,631.97	0.95	1.06 ↑	10	1,141,642
REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT					10	1,141,642
CONSTRUCTION/REAL ESTATE					34	1,229,119
CONSUMER GOODS						
S/N	AUTOMOBILES/AUTO PARTS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
22	DN TYRE & RUBBER PLC	954.53	0.20	- →	0	0
AUTOMOBILES/AUTO PARTS					0	0
S/N	BEVERAGES--BREWERS/DISTILLERS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
23	CHAMPION BREW. PLC.	37,581.58	4.80	4.35 ↑	49	1,302,067
24	GOLDEN GUINEA BREW. PLC.	829.98	0.81	- →	0	0
25	GUINNESS NIG PLC	159,240.83	72.70	- →	31	73,186
CONSUMER GOODS						
S/N	BEVERAGES--BREWERS/DISTILLERS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
26	INTERNATIONAL BREWERIES PLC.	131,624.14	4.90	5.38 ↑	28	550,686
27	NIGERIAN BREW. PLC.	430,056.14	41.85	- →	87	441,263
BEVERAGES--BREWERS/DISTILLERS					195	2,367,202
S/N	FOOD PRODUCTS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
28	BUA FOODS PLC	1,341,000.00	74.50	- →	25	254,374
29	DANGOTE SUGAR REFINERY PLC	206,496.93	17.00	- →	41	400,402
30	FLOUR MILLS NIG. PLC.	126,701.73	30.90	- →	54	608,097
31	HONEYWELL FLOUR MILL PLC	17,525.74	2.21	-5.15 ↓	66	2,540,011
32	MULTI-TREX INTEGRATED FOODS PLC	1,340.10	0.36	- →	0	0
33	N NIG. FLOUR MILLS PLC.	1,095.93	6.15	- →	0	0
34	NASCON ALLIED INDUSTRIES PLC	28,084.05	10.60	0.47 ↑	45	3,167,718
35	UNION DICON SALT PLC.	2,446.38	8.95	- →	0	0
FOOD PRODUCTS					231	6,970,602
S/N	FOOD PRODUCTS--DIVERSIFIED	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
36	CADBURY NIGERIA PLC.	22,256.69	11.85	-2.07 ↓	152	3,116,297
37	NESTLE NIGERIA PLC.	856,148.02	1,080.10	- →	64	70,182
FOOD PRODUCTS--DIVERSIFIED					216	3,186,479
S/N	HOUSEHOLD DURABLES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
38	NIGERIAN ENAMELWARE PLC.	1,231.72	16.20	- →	0	0
39	VITAFOAM NIG PLC.	27,393.49	21.90	- →	44	99,430
HOUSEHOLD DURABLES					44	99,430
S/N	PERSONAL/HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
40	P Z CUSSONS NIGERIA PLC.	40,101.82	10.10	- →	18	190,754
41	UNILEVER NIGERIA PLC.	74,972.32	13.05	6.97 ↑	146	2,034,925
CONSUMER GOODS						
S/N	PERSONAL/HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
PERSONAL/HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS					164	2,225,679
CONSUMER GOODS					850	14,849,392
FINANCIAL SERVICES						
S/N	BANKING	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
42	ECOBANK TRANSNATIONAL INCORPORATED	222,029.57	12.10	- →	34	255,863
43	FIDELITY BANK PLC	146,032.98	5.04	0.60 ↑	104	5,324,070
44	GUARANTY TRUST HOLDING COMPANY PLC	716,649.21	24.35	1.25 ↑	219	6,712,639
45	JAIZ BANK PLC	29,705.41	0.86	1.16 ↑	32	2,234,305
46	STERLING BANK PLC.	44,625.15	1.55	-0.65 ↓	41	3,087,785
47	UNION BANK NIG.PLC.	186,372.82	6.40	- →	10	137,602
48	UNITY BANK PLC	6,429.14	0.55	- →	8	57,289
49	WEMA BANK PLC.	51,432.62	4.00	1.52 ↑	28	318,586
BANKING					476	18,128,139
S/N	INSURANCE CARRIERS, BROKERS AND SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
50	AFRICAN ALLIANCE INSURANCE PLC	4,117.00	0.20	- →	0	0
FINANCIAL SERVICES						
S/N	INSURANCE CARRIERS, BROKERS AND SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
51	AIICO INSURANCE PLC.	23,427.38	0.64	-1.54 ↓	30	1,256,826
52	AXAMANSARD INSURANCE PLC	18,000.00	2.00	- →	14	30,037
53	CONSOLIDATED HALLMARK INSURANCE PLC	6,957.93	0.65	-7.69 ↓	13	2,107,025
54	CORNERSTONE INSURANCE PLC	9,809.85	0.54	-6.90 ↓	13	2,956,150
55	CORONATION INSURANCE PLC	9,836.59	0.41	-2.38 ↓	23	344,613
56	GOLDLINK INSURANCE PLC	909.99	0.20	- →	0	0
57	GUINEA INSURANCE PLC.	1,228.00	0.20	- →	1	6,080
58	INTERNATIONAL ENERGY INSURANCE PLC	680.57	0.53	- →	4	107,332
59	LASACO ASSURANCE PLC.	1,815.25	0.99	4.21 ↑	6	1,841,948
60	LINKAGE ASSURANCE PLC	7,000.00	0.50	- →	12	1,090,406
61	MUTUAL BENEFITS ASSURANCE PLC.	7,021.57	0.35	6.06 ↑	29	11,258,018
62	NEM INSURANCE PLC	20,316.73	4.05	- →	5	141,718
63	NIGER INSURANCE PLC	1,547.90	0.20	- →	0	0
64	PRESTIGE ASSURANCE PLC	6,096.18	0.46	- →	3	11,956
65	REGENCY ASSURANCE PLC	1,800.56	0.27	- →	1	2,000
66	SOVEREIGN TRUST INSURANCE PLC	2,954.76	0.26	- →	15	1,085,200
67	STACO INSURANCE PLC	4,483.72	0.48	- →	0	0
68	STANDARD ALLIANCE INSURANCE PLC.	2,582.21	0.20	- →	0	0
69	SUNU ASSURANCES NIGERIA PLC.	2,150.00	0.37	- →	0	0
70	UNIVERSAL INSURANCE PLC	3,200.00	0.20	- →	0	0
71	VERITAS KAPITAL ASSURANCE PLC	2,773.33	0.20	- →	4	550,500
INSURANCE CARRIERS, BROKERS AND SERVICES					173	22,789,809
S/N	MICRO-FINANCE BANKS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
72	NPF MICROFINANCE BANK PLC	9,888.34	1.65	- →	5	12,531

MAIN BOARD		DEALS	MARKET PRICE		QUANTITY TRADED	VALUE TRADED (N)
FINANCIAL SERVICES						
S/N	MICRO-FINANCE BANKS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
MICRO-FINANCE BANKS					2	15,500
S/N	MORTGAGE CARRIERS, BROKERS AND SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
73	ABBEY MORTGAGE BANK PLC	17,058.46	1.68	- →	2	25
74	ASO SAVINGS AND LOANS PLC	7,370.87	0.50	- →	0	0
75	INFINITY TRUST MORTGAGE BANK PLC	5,296.48	1.27	- →	0	0
FINANCIAL SERVICES						
S/N	MORTGAGE CARRIERS, BROKERS AND SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
76	RESORT SAVINGS & LOANS PLC	2,265.95	0.20	- →	0	0
77	UNION HOMES SAVINGS AND LOANS PLC.	2,949.22	3.02	- →	0	0
MORTGAGE CARRIERS, BROKERS AND SERVICES					2	25
S/N	OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
78	AFRICA PRUDENTIAL PLC	12,000.00	6.00	-1.64 ↓	47	728,820
79	DEAP CAPITAL MANAGEMENT & TRUST PLC	300.00	0.20	- →	0	0
80	FCMB GROUP PLC.	79,210.84	4.00	-0.25 ↓	68	1,721,977
81	NIGERIAN EXCHANGE GROUP	53,031.13	27.00	- →	29	882,350
82	ROYAL EXCHANGE PLC.	4,373.56	0.85	- →	8	150,000
83	STANBIC IBTC HOLDINGS PLC	414,623.91	32.00	- →	58	665,299
84	UNITED CAPITAL PLC	87,900.00	14.65	- →	94	1,976,533
OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS					304	6,124,979
FINANCIAL SERVICES					1,150	46,884,074
HEALTHCARE						
S/N	HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
85	EKOCORP PLC.	2,886.90	5.79	- →	0	0
HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS					0	0
S/N	MEDICAL SUPPLIES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
86	MORISON INDUSTRIES PLC.	2,146.48	2.17	- →	1	500
MEDICAL SUPPLIES					1	500
S/N	PHARMACEUTICALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
87	FIDSON HEALTHCARE PLC	21,802.46	9.50	1.60 ↑	43	331,839
88	GLAXO SMITHKLINE CONSUMER NIG. PLC.	7,952.58	6.65	- →	22	110,241
89	MAY & BAKER NIGERIA PLC.	7,677.30	4.45	- →	25	374,938
HEALTHCARE						
S/N	PHARMACEUTICALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
90	NEIMETH INTERNATIONAL PHARMACEUTICALS PLC	2,962.69	1.56	- →	14	25,491
91	PHARMA-DEKO PLC.	455.32	2.10	- →	0	0
PHARMACEUTICALS					104	842,509
HEALTHCARE					105	843,009
ICT						
S/N	COMPUTER BASED SYSTEMS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
92	COURTEVILLE BUSINESS SOLUTIONS PLC	1,704.96	0.48	-4.00 ↓	15	850,036
COMPUTER BASED SYSTEMS					15	850,036
S/N	COMPUTERS AND PERIPHERALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
93	OMATEK VENTURES PLC	588.36	0.20	- →	0	0
COMPUTERS AND PERIPHERALS					0	0
S/N	IT SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
94	CWG PLC	2,373.34	0.94	-9.62 ↓	5	1,001,005
95	NCR (NIGERIA) PLC.	388.80	3.60	- →	0	0
IT SERVICES					5	1,001,005
S/N	PROCESSING SYSTEMS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
96	CHAMS HOLDING COMPANY PLC	1,314.90	0.28	7.69 ↑	46	11,218,160
97	E-TRANZACT INTERNATIONAL PLC	32,200.00	3.50	- →	9	11,764
PROCESSING SYSTEMS					55	11,229,924
S/N	TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
98	AIRTEL AFRICA PLC	6,050,623.92	1,610.00	- →	33	3,513
TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES					33	3,513
ICT					108	13,084,478
INDUSTRIAL GOODS						
S/N	BUILDING MATERIALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
99	BERGER PAINTS PLC	2,014.27	6.95	4.51 ↑	10	143,723
100	BUA CEMENT PLC	3,367,810.01	99.45	- →	37	59,579
INDUSTRIAL GOODS						
S/N	BUILDING MATERIALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
101	CAP PLC	14,502.51	17.80	- →	8	42,120
102	MEYER PLC.	1,174.04	2.21	- →	0	0
103	PREMIER PAINTS PLC.	1,230.00	10.00	- →	0	0
BUILDING MATERIALS					55	245,422
S/N	ELECTRONIC AND ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
104	AUSTIN LAZ & COMPANY PLC	2,192.12	2.03	- →	0	0
105	CUTIX PLC.	7,362.33	2.09	- →	9	150,805
ELECTRONIC AND ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS					9	150,805
S/N	PACKAGING/CONTAINERS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
106	BETA GLASS PLC.	23,758.67	39.60	- →	1	23
107	GREIF NIGERIA PLC	232.39	5.45	- →	0	0
108	TRIPPLE GEE AND COMPANY PLC.	395.96	0.80	- →	2	12,283
PACKAGING/CONTAINERS					3	12,306
S/N	AGRO-ALLIED & CHEMICALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
109	NOTORE CHEMICAL IND PLC	100,754.14	62.50	- →	0	0
AGRO-ALLIED & CHEMICALS					0	0
INDUSTRIAL GOODS					67	408,533
NATURAL RESOURCES						
S/N	CHEMICALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
110	INDUSTRIAL & MEDICAL GASES NIGERIA PLC	3,696.25	7.40	- →	2	705
CHEMICALS					2	705
S/N	METALS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
111	ALUMINIUM EXTRUSION IND. PLC.	1,429.71	6.50	- →	0	0
METALS					0	0
NATURAL RESOURCES						
S/N	MINING SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
112	MULTIVERSE MINING AND EXPLORATION PLC	1,768.70	4.15	4.27 ↑	15	2,252,816
MINING SERVICES					15	2,252,816
S/N	PAPER/FOREST PRODUCTS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
113	THOMAS WYATT NIG. PLC.	319.00	1.45	- →	5	48,779
PAPER/FOREST PRODUCTS					5	48,779
NATURAL RESOURCES					22	2,302,300
OIL AND GAS						
S/N	ENERGY EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
114	JAPAUL GOLD & VENTURES PLC	1,753.56	0.28	-6.67 ↓	11	234,074
ENERGY EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES					11	234,074
S/N	INTEGRATED OIL AND GAS SERVICES	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
115	OANDO PLC	48,731.14	3.92	- →	52	1,063,083
INTEGRATED OIL AND GAS SERVICES					52	1,063,083
S/N	PETROLEUM AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS DISTRIBUTORS	MARKET CAP(Nm)	PRICE	%CHANGE	TRADES	VOLUME
116	ARDOVA PLC	24,877.39	19.10	- →	25	135,364
117	CONOIL PLC	18,389.73	26.50	- →	16	102,143
118	ETERNA PLC.	9,455.05	7.25	0.69 ↑	47	2,172,313
119	MRS OIL NIGERIA PLC.	5,486.16	16.00	- →	6	4,526
120	TOTALENERGIES MARKETING NIGERIA PLC	72,080.49	212.30	- →	25	32,892
PETROLEUM AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS DISTRIBUTORS					119	2,447,238
OIL AND GAS					182	3,744,395

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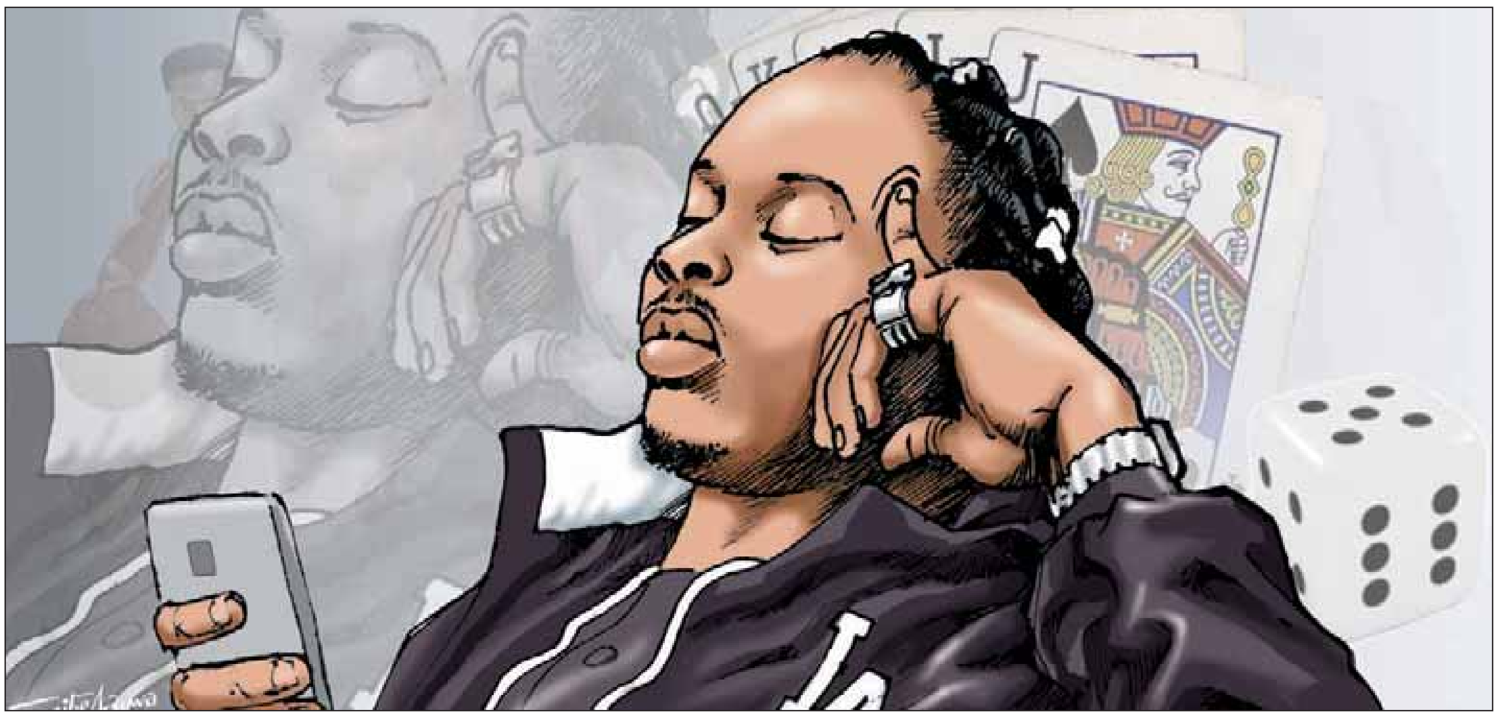
Naira Marley's Winning Bet with UK Bookmaker Sparks Conversation on 'Illegal' Operators

Nseobong Okon-Ekong asked operators and regulators in the gaming Industry if a sports betting company based outside Nigeria can accept a bet from Nigerians



The final match at the Qatar World Cup, between Argentina and France, was a win-some-lose-some moment for punters all over the world. For celebrated Nigerian entertainer Azeez Fashola, better known as Naira Marley, the soccer duel ended on a sweet note, making him £3,888.41 (N3,305,148.5 street exchange rate at N850 to £1) richer. Naira Marley posted a betting ticket with the name 'QAT-CHING' on Twitter from a foreign bookie he cleverly shielded. A further search on the internet, however, revealed that Marley had actually placed his bet with Paddy Power, an Irish bookmaker that has adopted a two-pronged approach to its business: The UK Ireland (UKI) transactions are controlled from its headquarters in Dublin, while it chose Malta as a base for its international business. Having merged with Betfair in 2016, it is now run by Flutter Entertainment as its parent company. Paddy Power is part of Flutter Entertainment Plc, an international sports betting and gaming operator listed on the London and Irish Stock Exchanges.

DID PADDY POWER FLOUT NIGERIAN/UK LAWS?

Last October, the Federal Government hinted at the possibility of issuing a remote permit to operators with a valid licence in another jurisdiction that wants to serve players in Nigeria. The terms and conditions would be spelt out by the National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC) under its Director General, Mr Lanre Gbajabiamila. The proposed permit will be valid for five years. Operators will pay an initial $100,000 to receive the permit, followed by fees of $50,000 for the next four years. This suggestion immediately met stiff opposition from operators domiciled in Nigeria. Its umbrella trade group, the Association of Nigerian Bookmakers (ANB), expressed surprise about the plan to give remote operation permits to foreign operators. ANB's Executive Secretary, Bimpe Akingba, explained to GAMING WEEK in a recent interview that the body understood that regulators were attempting"to block them (foreign operators) and make them come inside to get a license." Therefore, information on the possibility of remote permits to foreign operators came to the body "as a shock."

The NLRC has a list that contains ALL (with emphasis) Sports Betting Operators approved by the Federal Republic of Nigeria on its website. It clearly states, "Any Sports Betting Operator not listed (here) is classified as an illegal operator."

Paddy Power is glaringly not on the NLRC list. Whereas the Nigerian Bookmaker, Blackbet, promoted by Mr Jason Njoku, is licensed both in Nigeria and the UK.

Responding to whether companies based outside Nigeria can accept a bet from Nigerians, Mr. Yahaya Maikori, Principal Partner, Law Allianz, said, "Nothing stops them since they are not actively targeting Nigerian players. This is the era of e-commerce."

GAMING WEEK enquired of Paddy Power, Paddy Power's CEO, Peter Jackson and the Betting and Gaming Council (BGC) @BetGamecouncil, the standards body that regulates the betting and gaming industry in the UK through email and Twitter. The responses came via @askpaddypower on Twitter. It apologised for its inability to "comment on customers' accounts." The email to the CEO with the address on the company's website failed to deliver.

"Many thanks for contacting the Betting and Gaming Council. You will receive a reply to your email in due course," said an automatic email reply from the BGC. That was eight days ago. No further communication has been received from the BGC.

Its Nigerian counterpart, the NLRC, has neither responded to the corporate enquiry directed at it nor has the Director-General answered similar questions sent to his phone. Also, tweets at @officialnairam1 to clarify some issues were not acknowledged.

Drawing a line between an individual and a corporate body, Mr Bashir Are, Chief Executive Officer, Lagos State Lotteries and Gaming Authority (LSLGA), based his conclusions on the Nigerian constitution.

He stated: "Our focus is about compliance by all operators. You can not conduct such business in Nigeria physically or remotely without complete adherence to the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as amended. It is an illegal business operation as far as the Nigerian constitution is concerned."

WHERE WAS MARLEY WHEN HE PLACED THE BET?

Considering the location of Marley at the time he placed the bet, Mr. Tunji Idowu, Managing Director, Velex Advisory, made a couple of observations. One, he shouldn't be able to play from Nigeria. But if this is possible - it means that foreign companies can operate in Nigeria without a license, not paying tax, and collecting data of Nigerians without being data compliant to the Nigeria Data Protection Bureau (NDPB). "All these are illegal," he stated like Bashir Are.

The second possibility put forward by Idowu is that Marley could have placed his winning bet "while abroad because he was physically present in that jurisdiction."

Marley is standing trial on an 11-count charge bordering on credit card fraud, for which the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is prosecuting him at a Federal High Court in Lagos.

This is how the foreign bookie @Ask PADDY POWER responded to our questions, "we would not comment on customers' accounts, apologies."

An executive of a Nigerian Bookmaker, MelBet, Mr Alexander Ezekiel, observed the pattern of Marley's bet as that of an experienced punter, He said, "His selections were heavily calculated and professional too, it shows it's not his first time, or he was probably led by someone who knows the game very well."

Ezekiel was disappointed that the resulting media attention from Marley's winning bet should have been on a Nigerian operator.

He explained, "I can say for certain there is nothing a foreign company wants to pay him that MelBet cannot give him and even more, coupled with the bonuses, fast payout, easy payout and funny enough we bear the tax and don't charge the players, so tell me is it not better to bet in Nigeria?"

Every respondent, including Are, Maikori and Mr Ola Faro of Afe Babalola Chambers, held the view that Marley did not contravene any law.

"There is no law prohibiting it, so he can't be sanctioned," said Faro.

Maikori added, "There is no law against him placing a bet on a foreign sports books."

The Lagos State Lotteries Regulatory chief said "we can not sanction individuals."

THREAT OF ILLEGAL FOREIGN OPERATORS IN NIGERIA

The activities of illegal gaming operators pose an imminent threat to the survival of duly licensed local bookmakers. While the sole consideration of the federal government in suggesting offshore permit to foreign operators is anchored on revenue generation, the ANB argues that the focus need not be on revenue generation every time.

Its Executive Secretary, Bimpe Akingba, said, "The FG should look beyond revenue generation to the implication of licencing these operators remotely. The first question is, how do you hope to ensure compliance, since these companies do not have a physical presence in Nigeria? What benefit is it to local operators to have competitors who are not dealing with issues of double taxation? Double taxation is a major problem for local operators. It is a major source of profit drain. There is the issue of repatriation of funds for foreign operators who are locally licensed here. Local operators are generating employment. Why would the FG, in the gaming industry, allow some people outside Nigeria, who are not generating employment cash in on the industry? Apart from generating employment for Nigerians the locally licensed operators are paying gaming taxes. They are paying company income tax, PAYE; all of these other taxes. Besides direct employment there are other types of employment generated. These people have vendors. In advertising, they are engaging local advertisement agencies. There are no benefits to allow the illegal operators into the country."

The war against illegal operators in the gaming industry can only make an appreciable impact through a sustained effort. Therefore, the Chief Gaming Industry Regulator in Lagos, Bashir Are has elected to "sanction those operators locally and at the international level. It may take time, but they will pay for their illegal activities."

He insisted, "Offshore license is illegal under the Nigeria Constitution." He spoke further on the illegal operators' negative impact, and said, "It will also create massive layoffs in the industry. Nigeria investors must enjoy their initial investments, they struggle to get the industry to where it is today, offshore operators has miniature benefit to our economy. It is another loophole for capital flights, which will further damage value of naira."

Faro, who is in the team of lawyers deployed by the ANB, noted that illegal operators is "one of the issues raised by the Association of Nigerian Bookmakers which need urgent attention."

The story continues online on www.thisdaylive.com

Lotto Star Brings Gaming Angle into BBTitans

Nseobong Okon-Ekong

One of South Africa's leaders in the gaming industry, Lotto Star @Lotto_Star, has staked its reputation and every Rand it can afford to support ongoing television reality contest featuring 20 of the brightest housemates from Africa's giant countries, Nigeria and South Africa.

It's Day 11 and there are still 61 days more

to witness the nail-biting drama that will produce a winner who will go home with the ultimate prize of $100,000.

#BBTitans is proudly sponsored by LottoStar, which provides every South African with the chance to bet on the results of the world's biggest lottery games. Viewers are enjoined to catch in on the fun too by spinning the reels on 'Lucky Lucky' for a chance to win payouts of up to R2 Million with LottoStar's Reel Rush Games.

Big Brother Titans is streaming 24/7 on Showmax, as well as DStv channel 198 and GOtv Channels 29, owned by leading entertainment company MultiChoice Nigeria, since January 15 2023.

LottoStar's The Star Foundation is popular for supporting good causes like its recent donation of R1.2 Million to Project Flamingo to 200 women receiving life-changing surgery. LottoStar's The Star Foundation is collaborating with Kfm 94.5 on a 12-month campaign to raise funds for Project Flamingo, a non-profit company that strives to improve inclusive cancer care in the South African public health sector by providing the scarce resources needed for breast cancer surgery.

GAMINGWEEK

John Ikpeme: We Can Break into the Billion-Dollar Gaming Market

Last November, John Ikpeme's Dash Studios made a pitch ranked one of the top three pitches at the global games pitch, he told the **GAMING WEEK team** in a recent interview

What are social impact games all about?

We believe that games should bring people together rather than push them apart. Every technology should really do. So we focus on the integration of social games because we believe that games could be a tool for bringing people together, and we service in crazy amounts during the pandemic. So, people were at home locked in. There were different methods of communication people could choose from a lot. Millions of people chose gaming, and the gaming industry saw a growth during that period that it has never seen in quite some time. So it's quite obvious that social games are the future and social games should be the focus.

How did you discover the gaming industry, and how long have you been operating?

I played games for as long as I can remember. I remember my first console that my mother bought for me when I was eight, I think. And I've loved games ever since but I really went into the industry full focus in 2018. I am a data analyst/scientist by profession so I entered the games industry, not as a game developer or a programmer or an animator. I entered with a passion backed by data, and I wanted to make a change here and I realized that something was wrong. No African products or Nigerian products are selling on the global stage as other games are selling and I went around and asked a lot of founders and developers what was the hindrance? What was stopping us from doing what King does or Activision is doing? That was what led me and my cofounders to set up a studio with the sole aim of creating games that are commercially viable.

Ikpeme

"So it's clear that African games can be loved everywhere in the world. And the feedback I've gotten from our testers in Japan has been incredible."

What was the feedback you got from those questions?

I can say one thing. They are extremely passionate about what they do. They love games. But the problem with the African or the Nigerian game industry at large is that we're just a bunch of game developers. There's a bunch of creative people. There is no business nature like studios. We don't run game studios in Nigeria like an actual company. You need your books to keep it balanced in everything to make sense. You need to put data into consideration if you want to break into the different markets in Africa, Asia. There's a lot of statistics that come into place. So that's what the Nigerian gaming industry lacked. And then I saw that, of course, there's a lack of funding, markets. I am still very bullish on the fact that if we build our studios, products and our companies in a way that is appealing to the global market slowly, but surely, we will break into the billion-dollar markets.

Would you say you are inching closer to that vision with your studio?

Well, we've been working on NOUNS. NOUNS is our debut game to the market.

When did you launch it?

We started working on it last April and projected it to launch in January 2023. So since it was our first product, we cannot be naive. We wanted to test it on a lot of users. So far, we've had over 1000 testers in over 20 countries across the world, including USA, UK, Japan, Australia and other places. We've also attended global summits and events to try and grow the awareness because we did not want to launch blind and this led us to become top three pitches at the global games pitch in November. So it's clear that African games can be loved everywhere in the world. And the feedback I've gotten from our testers in Japan has been incredible. And they love it and can't wait for it to come on. So I can't say that we are inching closer to a dream because the dream is just to be as good as our western counterparts are, millions of players every single day but we are on track.

Is there a particular cause attached to your games?

With NOUNS, we wanted to explore the educational part of the games. We noticed something as a trend in society that parents do not love children playing games, which is really against the entire point of it because children learn faster from games. It doesn't have to be a controller, you know. These are little things they play around with on the floor. Those are games. Running around every day, those are games. So we are taking it to the platform that kids are much more attracted to nowadays, which are phones and laptops, and the rest of them. We're trying to give them an opportunity to not just play games for the fun of it but also learn from it. That's what NOUNS does, explore the concepts in single-player, multi-player, and storyboard, trying to get the players together and learn.

PRAGMATIC PLAY FULFILLS PROMISE...

Adebowale Adedayo, better known as Mr. Macaroni, Pragmatic Play's brand ambassador making good the company's promise of iPhone14 Promax to the star prize winner, Mr. Orimogunje Olutayo. Other categories of winners had €100 to five persons, €50 to 10 persons and €25 to 10 persons, as well

FORECAST

Can Arsenal Remain Better?

Davidson Abraham

It's another weekend full of action across the top European leagues the clash of the Weekend is Manchester City versus Arsenal. The two English Premiership heavyweights are currently battling it out at the summit of the English premier league and it will be the same when they clash again at the Etihad on Friday. Both teams are in good form but Arsenal has been an overall better team this season. However, it should be noted that City rarely loose at home. Man City are also likely to lose the title race to Arsenal, leaving the FA Cup, League Cup and possibly the UEFA Champions League as their hopes for silverware. Bookmakers have given both sides considerable chances of advancing to the next round and it is set to be an entertaining encounter. Enjoy!

Still hanging on with the FA Cup, Burnley, Leicester City, Manchester United and Tottenham are expected to easily defeat their opponents and advance to the next round. In Ligue 1 and La Liga PSG and Barcelona should routinely dispatch their opponents. In Serie A, Inter visit bottom placed Cremonense in what should be a big win for the Nerrazurri; While Napoli will host AS Roma at the Diego Armando Maradona stadium for the Serie A clash of the weekend. Roma have proved to be stubborn but should be no match for Spalleti's sensational side who put Juventus to the sword, trashing them 5-1 in an excellent display. Over in the Bundesliga, Bayern Munich are expected to return to winning ways when they host Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

WEEK 4 Betting Tips

DATE	FIXTURE	BETTING TIPS
Fri, 27 Jan	Man City Vs Arsenal	Over 1.5
Sat, 28 Jan	Walsall Vs Leicester City	2
Sat, 28 Jan	Ipswch Town Vs Burnley	2
Sat, 28 Jan	Preston North End Vs Tottenham	2
Sat, 28 Jan	Girona Vs Barcelona	2
Sat, 28 Jan	Cremonense Vs Inter	2 & Over 1.5
Sat, 28 Jan	Bayern Munich Vs Eintracht Frankfurt	Over 1.5
Sun, 29 Jan	Man United Vs Reading	1 & Over 1.5
Sun, 29 Jan	Napoli Vs Roma	1x & Over 1.5
Sun, 29 Jan	PSG Vs Reims	1

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NEWS

RANDLE CENTRE FOR YORUBA CULTURE AND HISTORY...

L-R: First Lady of Lagos State, Dr. Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu; Ooni of Ife, Oba Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja I; Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu; President Muhammadu Buhari; Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed; his counterpart for Youth and Sports Development, Mr. Sunday Dare, and Commissioner for Tourism, Arts and Culture, Mrs. Uzamat Akinbile-Yusuf, during the inauguration of John Randle Centre for Yoruba Culture and History, at Onikan, Lagos…Tuesday

CBN, FCTA Step Up Sensitisation Campaign on Naira Redesign Project

●Late delivery of invitation letters stalls lawmakers' meeting with bank CEOs, rescheduled for today

Olawale Ajimotokan, Juliet Akoje in Abuja, **Nume Ekeghe** and **Oluchi Chibuzor** in Lagos

With six days to the expiration of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) January 31st deadline for the phasing out of the old N1,000, N500 and N200, the FCT Administration has stepped up sensitisation of residents especially rural dwellers across the 17 Chiefdoms in Abuja.

Yesterday through its Department of Reforms Coordination and Service Improvement (RCSI), it took the awareness campaign targeted at further dissemination of the information about the CBN's new currency policy to the residents especially those at the grassroots level, to traditional rulers across the 17 chiefdoms of the FCT.

Explaining the initiative during a visit to the Palaces of Sarkin Bwari and Esu Bwari, Abuja, Mr. Fatai Bello, who led the FCTA team from RCSI, said the FCT Administration under the leadership of the FCT Minister, Malam Muhammad Musa Bello was concerned that as the January 31 deadline was fast approaching, the newly redesigned currencies might not have gotten to the rural communities of the FCT.

This, he said, explained why FCTA decided to assist in engaging traditional rulers and to ensure that they got to their subjects, urging that they should take their money to banks before the expiration of the deadline.

"The campaign is being carried out in the 17 Chiefdoms of the FCT across the six Area Councils. We already have the giggles being running on most of the radio stations, so the message is actually going down to the target group, who are receiving the message quite well.

"It is our responsibility as the Reform Coordination and Service Improvement Department, for which we run 24/7 call centre. And we received daily via calls some of the questions and concerns raised during the visit to the Chiefs. We have a mechanism of which we pass these concerns to the appropriate authorities, and get feedback," he added.

At the Sa Bwaya palace in Bwari, the the Esu Bwari, HRH Ibrahim Yaro, who commended the FCT Minister for the sensitisation effort, said they have been trying their best to see that people having old notes in their houses should take them to the banks on or before the deadline.

On his part, Sarkin Bwari, Alhaji Awwal Musa Muhammad Ijakoro, suggested that the government could consider provision cash collection centres in rural areas, so as to help ameliorate the hardships that the people go through to deposit their old currencies in the banks outside their settlements.

In Lagos State, the central bank continued its aggressive sensitisation and monitoring on the circulation of the newly redesign naira across the state. The CBN also urged Nigerians to embrace cashless policy for high volume transactions.

A check at some banks within the community showed that Zenith Bank at Lagbade, Epe, was dispensing the new notes, while other banks cited logistics reasons to get the new notes from the currency management hub in Lagos Island as reasons for their continued issuance of the old notes.

Speaking at the Oluwo Modern Fish Market, Epe, the Deputy Director, Other Financial Institutions Supervision, CBN, Mrs. Monsurat Vincent, urged the fishing community to embrace the bank's cashless policy in their daily market transaction.

Explaining the key features of the re-designed note to the riverine community, she stressed that there would be no extension to the deadline by the apex bank, as such they must report banks which refuse to collect the old notes from them.

"So we are encouraging everyone to please use the ATM channels as the new notes are available there. The volume of cash in circulation is extremely on the high side, costly, and is not safe; that is why we are saying let us embrace the cashless policy, " she said.

Continues online

Ekiti Impeachment Suit: Court Orders Parties to File Pending Processes

●Adjourns to Feb 8 for definite hearing

Gbenga Sodeinde in Ado Ekiti

An Ekiti State High Court sitting in Ado Ekiti has ordered parties in the suit filed by former Speaker of the state House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Gboyega Aribisogan challenging his impeachment to file all their pending processes ahead of definite hearing of the matter.

Justice Adekunle Adeleye who gave the order at the court's sitting yesterday, expressed readiness to hear the Defendants' Preliminary Objection and Counter-Affidavit together along with the Motion of the Claimants in the suit.

The defendants in the suit were the Ekiti State House of Assembly (1st), the Clerk of the House of Assembly (2nd) and Rt. Hon. Olubunmi Adelugba, the new Speaker of the House of Assembly (3rd).

Counsel to the Claimant, Mr. Sunday Olowolafe had earlier brought a motion for a prayer to set down the case for hearing and a prayer for an order of the court to enter judgment for his client in default of pleadings.

But counsel to the Defendants, Chief Rafiu O. Balogun, who insisted to be on the record of the court, countered that the Claimant's Motion was not ripe for hearing in view of a Notice of Preliminary Objection he filed on behalf of his clients.

Justice Adeleye who expressed desire of the suit to be heard in good time, urged counsel to the Defendants to file Counter-Affidavit which he said would be heard with the Preliminary Objection.

But Balogun said his position was supported by Order 5 Rule 2 of the Ekiti State High Court Rules, saying filing Counter Affidavit would amount to waiver and non-compliance with the Rules which provides that issues of irregularities must be raised before taking any further step.

The counsel to the Defendants argued further that the issue of jurisdiction must be taken first before hearing of the substantive matter. He urged the court to give a date for hearing of the preliminary objection.

The judge subsequently delivered a short ruling ordering the Defendants to file their Counter-Affidavit for the Preliminary Objection and the substantive matter to be taken together on the authority of Inakoju v Adeleke.

After the ruling, counsel to the Claimant, Olowolafe, prayed for a short leave for all parties in the suit to file in their processes.

Enugu APC Moves to Suspend Nnamani, Two Others Over Anti-Party Activities

Gideon Arinze in Enugu

All Progressives Congress, (APC) in Enugu State has set up a five-man disciplinary Committee to look into petitions and reports of fact-finding committees that investigated allegations of anti-party activities levelled against former Senate President, Ken Nnamani and two other members of the party in the state.

Headed by the State Assistant Legal Adviser, Barr. Vincent Chieyina and secretary, Hon Jekwu Nnaji, the disciplinary committee is to invite Nnamani and two others, including a former Commissioner in Enugu State, Ozor Joe Mmamel and Nelson Maduka Arum to answer charges against them.

Reading the resolution of the party's State Executive Committee, SEC at the end of its meeting at the party's zonal office in Enugu yesterday, the state secretary of the APC, Robert Ngwu said that the party would not hesitate to expel or suspend Nnamani, Ozor Mmamel and Arum, should they be found culpable of the allegations against them.

Ngwu said that anti-party is a terminal sin against any political party, hence the State committee believes it is imperative to tackle this matter head-on, adding that the Party was fully aware of the nefarious activities of the previous administration of the Party in the 2015 and 2019 general elections.

"The SEC accused Nnamani of campaigning openly for the governorship candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) at a rally held at the Michael Okpara Square Enugu on January 20th 2023.

"Nnamani was represented by Ben Nwoye, an expelled former Chairman of Enugu state APC who has been working against the candidate of APC, and Maduka Arum, an acolyte and head of Ken Nnamani Political group," it said.

The SEC noted that Nnamani has had a history of anti-party activities as he has consistently campaigned against APC candidates, including Sen. Ayogu Eze, in 2019 after he joined APC from the PDP some years ago.

Akpabio Begins Campaign After Securing Supreme Court Judgement

Okon Bassey in Uyo

After securing judicial candidacy, the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate for Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District, Senator Godswill Akpabio has opened up campaign to actualise his political ambition.

On Wednesday Senator Akpabio kicked-off his ward tour of the district with a call on the people to cast their votes for the APC at the presidential, senatorial and other elections for quality development.

He also assured the people of the local government of his determination to deliver greater services with their support and votes in next month's national elections.

"Next month's election is a national one. We must use our votes to return Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu as our president, me as your Senator and other national assembly candidates on the 25th of February.

"The logo of our party is the Broom. I am now in the broom party because the umbrella had long been torn into shreds."

The National Vice Chairman of the APC Presidential Campaign Council, said he decided to kick off his ward tour after his Supreme Court victory in Oruk Anam because of his love for the people of the area and to show his appreciation for their support for him since 2006.

"The people of Oruk Anam are my political backbone and this dates back to 2006 when I was aspiring for the governorship of our dear state. You people supported me to defeat over 56 other aspirants at the primaries. You also stood by me to win the governorship election in 2006 and re-elected me in 2011.

"As governor, I laid a solid foundation for the future development of our senatorial District and the state in general. My uncommon performance in office as your governor was to lay foundation for the emergence of another governor within us in the future because as they say, one good turn deserves another.

Continues online

EDO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRADING CONFERENCE...

L-R: Senior Special Assistant to the President on Education Interventions, Mr. Fela-Bank- Olemoh; Edo State Commissioner for Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Diaspora Affairs, Bamidele Obaitan; Commissioner of Education, Dr. Joan Oviawe; Head of Projects, GIZ-SKYE, Mr. Tobias Wolfgarten, and Managing Director, Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO), Mr. Kelvin Uwaibi, at the Edo State Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Conference held in Benin City...yesterday

Restructuring, Devolution of Powers Key to Nigeria's Progress, Atiku Insists

Presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, yesterday reaffirmed his commitment to restructuring and devolution of powers to states and local governments in the country.

He predicated his position to the inadequacy of presidential system of government currently being operated in the country, which concentrated so much powers at the centre, to the detriment of the federating units.

Atiku stated this in Asaba at the inauguration of some projects executed by Governor Ifeanyi Okowa's administration in Delta State.

The projects inaugurated were Koka Flyover and Interchange along Asaba-Benin Expressway; Model Technical College, Asaba; Maryam Babangida Leisure Park, Asaba and Mother and Child Specialist Hospital and Advanced Diagnostics Centre, Owa-Alero, Ika North-East Local Government Area.

The PDP Presidential candidate said that over-concentration of powers at the centre had impeded the nation's growth, and expressed his willingness to undertake restructuring of the country if elected.

According to the former Vice President, if you look into the books you will see that this Benin-Asaba Expressway is a federal road but the state government has taken over the construction of this project because it is closer to the people of Delta State.

"We borrowed our Presidential system from the United States and in the United States the only federal roads you find are interstate roads that connect one state to another. Other internal roads, bridges and highways are the responsibility of state governments

"It is understandable because it is the military that gave birth to our own presidential system of government and you know how they accumulate too much powers to themselves to the detriment of the federating units.

"I believe that by the time we undertake a fundamental amendment to our constitution to restore the autonomy to the states and local governments as far as resources are concerned, we would have done away with this very huge bottleneck that has impeded our growth infrastructurally and otherwise," he said.

Atiku commended Okowa and Government of Delta for taking the initiative of restructuring even before it was constitutionally allowed, saying "congratulations Governor Okowa for this huge development that you have undertaken to the benefit of the people of Delta State and Nigerians in general who ply this road daily."

On the Model Technical College, Atiku called for a review of the educational system in the country to ensure productivity of Nigerians at all levels.

He disclosed that the type of educational system in Northern Nigeria was such that there were no drop-outs.

"The educational system was such that the brightest ones went to the universities; the second group went to the universities also, and the third went to Technical Colleges and the last but not the least, went to what we used to call craft schools.

"In the craft schools we had to learn cattle breeding, carpentry, poultry or even farming, that's agriculture. When you finished, you were given a capital to start a business.

"So, you see that the educational system did not produce non-performing or what we call unproductive members of the public. Every member of the society was productive. The only thing was that the level of productivity varied from stage to stage.

"No sooner we abandoned the first Republic for the second one, which was the military than all those systems were set aside. We now went to a kind of unitary educational system.

"We now rear and send every child to the university which they were not naturally endowed nor gifted by nature to attend.

"There must be a review of our educational system in such a way that every child is granted opportunities to go to school but of course, should be based on their God-given or natural talent; so that he/she can be useful to the community.

"You will see that in every aspect of our human endeavours, we have our thinking that can move us forward. So I want to thank the Governor for this initiative, even before we have a formal review of our educational system, he has decided to review the educational system in Delta State," he said.

Atiku commended Okowa for his hardwork, visionary and purposeful leadership, and congratulated the people of the state for having such a great leader.

He said that healthcare was among the 5-point agenda in his policy document and would rely on the competence and experience of Governor Okowa in executing his health policies for the country.

In his remarks, Okowa said that the Koka Flyover and Interchange was conceived and delivered by his administration to provide solution to the traffic gridlock along the Benin-Asaba highway, and expressed optimism that on completion of the dualisation of the Ughelli-Asaba road, the traffic along the Koka corridor would have been completely eliminated.

He said that his administration embarked on revamping of technical education in the state to equip youths with technical skills to make them employers of labour rather than job seekers.

He stated that his administration rehabilitated six existing technical colleges and award contracts for nine new model ones, with three already completed at Asaba, Effurun and Obiaruku.

At Owa-Alero, Okowa said that the Mother and Child Hospital and Advanced Medical Diagnostics Centre was well built, furnished with appropriate staff to improve the health of mothers and children.

Sirika: Govt to Activate Act Prohibiting Strike Action By Airport Workers

• As FEC okays N10bn projects in aviation ministry

Deji Elumoye in Abuja

The federal government on Wednesday formally reacted to Monday's strike action embarked upon by airport workers which disrupted flight operations with a vow to activate the Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) Act which prohibits strike actions by airports workers across the country.

Minister of Aviation, Senator Hadi Sirika, made this known while speaking with newsmen ahead of the weekly Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting presided over by Vice President Yemi Osinbajo at the State House, Abuja.

Asked for comments about recent work to rule action by aviation workers in Lagos which disrupted activities at the airport, the Minister while apologising to air passengers pledged that such incident will not happen again as government was ready to activate the FAAN Act which forbids any strike action by airport workers.

His words: "First we apologize to them, our teeming passengers in this difficult moment.

"Secondly, this will not happen in the future by the grace of God. And the reason is simple, aviation is an essential service, the Act has been assented to by Mr. President so strikes and riots around our airports are prohibited by the laws of the land.

"And now that we have the act in place and assented by Mr president and passed by the National Assembly. So we will deal with it according to the law. We will ensure no essential service is being disrupted by anybody no matter how aggrieved.

"There are other channels of channeling issues when they arise but they are not permitted to go on strike because aviation is an essential service and is by the law of the land now.

"I will give you an example, there was an airline that had to return to base because it couldn't land. Imagine if there was a patient on that aircraft? Imagine somebody attending to a very serious issue or matter at hand or business or a student trying to catch with a exam and then because of somebody who is aggrieved some other persons will die.

"Government will no longer allow that. So it's in the law of the land, check the FAAN Act, it's been assented to and it's going to take place soon, in fact now, from today we will not allow that.

"Government, our ears are always open, government is open to listen to any grievances and there are procedures for dealing with this kind of grievances. They should please desist from this, it is wrong, it is inhuman, it is not allowed, it is not permitted and we will not be permitting it any longer."

The Aviation Minister also told newsmen that FEC approved the total sum of N10,081,177,338.31 for projects in the ministry

According to him: "Today in Council, we got the memoranda. It is one memo that contains about three items one of which is the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Hadejia airstrip. And the total sum is N7,482,071,196.56 for a period of 18 months. And this contract is going to MESSRS CCECC.

"Then there is the construction of control tower and technical building in Enugu. The company is Messrs Mascot Associates Limited. And it is N1,973,606,141.75. And the third contract is for procurement of utility vehicles, to MSSRs Kaura Motors at N625,500,000.

"These are the memoranda and they've all been approved by Council today."

Briefing newsmen after the FEC meeting, Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Muhammed, who stood in for his Works and Housing counterpart, Babatunde Fashola disclosed that the Council augmented the construction of Mayan-Nashungo-Lizellie-Ketayo-Oju Ajila road in Benue by N1.635 billion while it also augmented the solar power project powering the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing by N300 million bringing the total cost of the project commenced in 2019 to N3 billion.

His words: "The Minister of works and housing presented one of the memos which was an approval for the revised estimated total cost of contract of rehabilitation for the construction of Mayan, Nashungo, lizelle Katayo, Oju Ajila road in Benue state.

"The contract for this road was actually awarded first in 2012. due to whatever reason, it is still not completed. And of course, if the contract was awarded in 2012, the 10 years later, you expect the contractor to ask for,augmentation. And that's what happened today, it was approved. The original contract was N1,035,000,000 is now being augmented with an additional N1,063,000,000. so the sum total is N2,099,708,1004.46.

"The other the other memo that was approved for the ministry actually has to do with the Mabuchi headquarters of the Ministry of Works and Housing. I'm sure it's no longer news, that the ministry headquarters does not depend or rely on the national grid for its power, they rely on their solar grid and the memo today was to seek approval for the estimated total cost of the contract for the design and installation of solar power plus micro grid system and energy litrofitting of the ministry.

Continues online

Defence Minister Seeks More UN Funding to End Insecurity

Kingsley Nwezeh in Abuja

The Minister of Defence, Maj Gen Bashir Magashi (rtd), yesterday, appealed to the United Nations (UN) to support the Nigerian Military to end insecurity in parts of the country.

Magashi, who spoke at a meeting with the delegation of the experts of the United Nations Independent High Level Panel on Security, Governance and Development in the Sahel held at the Ministry of Defence Headquarters in Abuja, said Nigeria was working hard to contain terrorists especially, in the North-eastern part of the country.

The defence minister noted that in comparative terms, Nigeria was contributing more than other countries in counterpart funding, deployment of manpower and provision of other logistics among the member-states of the Multinational Joint Task Force, (MNJTF).

He, however, made a strong case for improved resources on the part of the United Nations towards the promotion of global peace and regional economic prosperity to reduce the high level of poverty at all levels.

The Head of the UN Mission and Leader of the four-man delegation, Mr Abdullahi Boureima, alongside Nigerian panelist, Professor Jibrin Ibrahim, put the mandate of the UN High-level Panel in context, bothering on security, governance and development concerns facing the sahel region.

The delegation affirmed that part of the reasons for the meeting in all countries of their assignments, including Nigeria was to articulate and aggregate views on how to effectively summount the existential challenges facing the sahel region.

While thanking the minister for approving the visit, the UN group said eliciting Nigeria's perspective on the way forward was germane to their assignments, which set the tone for the meeting.

The interface, which had the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Dr Ibrahim Abubakar Kana, in attendance and other top management staff as well as the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Danlami Ibrahim, later went into question and answer session.

NEWS

UNILAG VC'S WORKING VISIT TO LUTH AND COLLEGE OF MEDICINES...

L-R; Provost, College of Medicines, Unilag, Prof. David Adewale Oke; Registrar, Unilag, Mr. Ismail Oladejo Azeez; Chief Medical Director, LUTH, Prof. Chris Bode; Vice Chancellor, University of Lagos, Prof. Folasade Ogunsola and Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academics and Reseach, Unilag, Prof. Bolanle Oboh during the working visit of the Vice Chancellor to the Lagos University Teaching Hospital and College of Medicines in Lagos...yesterday PHOTO: ABIODUN AJALA

NJC Recommends Appointment of Nine CJs, 84 Judges

Alex Enumah in Abuja

The National Judicial Council (NJC) has recommended the appointment of nine Chief Judges and 84 other judicial officers.

The recommended persons would after appointments serve at the Federal and State Courts across the country.

NJC's Director of Information, Mr. Soji Oye in a statement, said the candidates were presented for recommendations by a panel of interview during the NJC's 100th Meeting presided over by the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN), Justice Olukayode Ariwoola.

Those recommended for posts of CJs included: Justice Muhammad Tukur Aliyu for Kaduna, Justice Majebi Joe for Kogi, Justice Odusola Olusegun for Ondo, Justice Halima Mohammed for Gombe and Justice Lilian for Abia State.

Others are Justice Abdulateef Kamaldeen as Grand Kadi, Kwara State, Justice Stanley Lawal, President, Customary Court of Appeal, FCT, Justice Monisola Abodunde as President, Customary Court of Appeal in Ekiti and Justice Uhuo Uchenna as President, Customary Court of Appeal, Ebonyi State.

A breakdown of the recommended 84 Judicial officers showed that four are for Ondo State High Court and they are Akinbinu Sylvester Femi, Leonard Boyede Ologun, Bolatito Florence Ajibade and Akinwumi Bankole Jacob.

The Customary Court of Appeal in Ekiti has three nominees and they are Lawrence Babatope Ojo, Adegboye Rotimi Adesoji and Ogundele Olufolakemi Olufunke.

Borno State has five for appointment as Judges and they include Amina Mustapha, Ibrahim Mohammed Maina, Hafsatu Isah Bappah, Bukar Malgwi Umar and Mallam Buna Makinta while Anambra has two comprising Etomike Innocent Ndigwe and Tagbo Chinwuba Anieto.

The five nominated for Sokoto High Court bench are Bashar Ibrahim, Fatima Ahmadu Suka, Abubakar Adamu, Kabiru Muhammad and Amina Modi Yabo while the Sharia Court of Appeal in the state has two nominees as Kadi and are Idris Adamu and Mustapha Abdullahi Ahmad.

Ogun State High Court has eight nominees comprising Oluwafunke Omolara Odubanjo, Adelaja Adeola Ireti, Basirat Bolanle Adebowale, Adebowo Bamidele Adedapo, Ayodele Adebayo Omoniyi, Sunday Olufemi Adeniyi, Awofeso Ireti-Olu Babatunde and Abimola Christopher Shokunbi.

The two nominees for Bayelsa State High Court are Charlie Ebiyon Duke and Ekadi Amadise Michael while the six for Ebonyi State are Esther Awo Ota, BUkeni Ogoke Stella Ejituruchi, Ruth Obaji Okeh, Blessing Ibeabuchi Chukwu, Christopher Ofoke Mbam and Francis-Abba Solange Amaka.

The National Industrial Court of Nigeria has six nominees including Buhari Sani, Damachi-Onugba Agede Joyce, Hassan Muhammed Yakubu, Sandra Audu Yelwa, Subilim Emmanuel Danjuma and Muhammad Adamu Hamza.

Cross Rivers High Court has two nominees in persons of Okokon Edem Nyong and Amajama Jacob Eneji while the four for Adamawa High Court are Christopher Dominic Mapeo, Ahmed Isa, Mohammed Ibrahim Tola and Benjamin Lawan Manji.

Besides, Adamawa has one Kadi nominee for its Sharia Court of Appeal in person of Isa Yusuf khalid while its Customary Court of Appeal has another one Judge nominee in person of Adabala Nicholas.

The breakdown also showed that Rivers State High Court has five candidates comprising Asivosuo Maccarthy Oriye, Omonigho Nwibani, Comfort Ifikmotu- Awaji Adangor, Prince Chika Mini and Beauty Ihuoma Emmanuel-Okere while its Customary Court of Appeal has two Judges nominees, Odiki Daniel- Kalio and Tetenwi Ngeli Elerabari.

Zamfara High Court has four and they are Abdullahi Muhammad Gusau, Umar Adulnasir, Saad Garba Gurbin-Bore and Muntaka Ahmad Ya'akubu.

Osun State High Court has four nominees comprising Lasisi Muhammmed Adebayo, Awe Micheal Oludare, Fatimah Adejoke Sodamade and Owolawi Joseph Olukunle while has one and is Adamu Mohammed Jajere as well as one Kadi for its Sharia Court of Appeal in person of Kasim Mohammed Kasim.

Kaduna State High Court bench has seven candidates and they are Yakubu Bodamasi, Abdullahi Isiaka, Buhari Mohammed Balarabe Bashir Shitu Yusuf, Nana Fatima Mohammed

John Aku Ambi and Joyce Asabe Akaa'ahs.

Apart from the recommended seven hlpigh court Judges, NJC also sought for appointment of five Kadis for Kaduna Sharia Court of Appeal and they are Aminu Ahmad Jumare, Nuhu Mahmud, Murtala Nasir, Abdulrahman Ibrahim and Mahdi Muhammad Suraj.

In the same vein, Kaduna Customary Court of Appeal is to have three Judges and they are Dorothy Sim Inwulale, Atung Dorcaas Tabitta and Yusuf Yakubu.

The breakdown also showed that Plateau State Customary Court of Appeal has only one Judge nominee in person of Jettei T. Pekun.

The NJC statement indicated that all recommended candidates would be sworn- in upon approval of their recommendations by their respective state governors and State Houses of Assembly.

Edo Records More Lassa Fever Cases, Govt Moves to Contain Disease

Edo State Commissioner for Health, Prof. Obehi Akoria, yesterday, said Etsako West, Esan West and Esan North East were the most affected local government areas by Lassa fever in the state.

The state government also called for the collaboration of residents to contain the pandemic across all communities in the state.

Addressing journalists in Benin City, the Commissioner said the government has continued to step up surveillance and response activities to curb the spread of the disease and ensure the health and well-being of residents in the state.

Obehi, said the state had also confirmed one more death from the disease in Esan West LGA, raising the total number of fatalities recorded in the state to 10.

She said Edo State recorded 97 confirmed cases of the disease, adding that the three most affected cases accounted for 75 per cent of confirmed cases in the state.

The Commissioner said while Etsako West recorded 38 cases of the 97 confirmed cases in the state, Esan West recorded 24, and Esan North East, 19.

Others were Esan Central, 3; Esan South East, 2; Etsako East, 2; Owan East, 2; Akoko Edo, 2; Ovia North East,2; Oredo, 2 and Etsako Central, 1.

She said the total fatalities recorded in the state were confirmed in Etsako West (4); Esan West (2); Esan NE (2); Etsako East (1) and Oredo (1).

Reiterating the government's commitment to ensuring the health and safety of residents, the health commissioner urged residents to comply with all health protocols to contain the spread of the disease so as to keep themselves and their loved ones protected from the disease.

Akoria charged, "While the government is implementing a number of measures to prevent the spread of the disease in the state, we urge everyone to support the government's efforts in curbing the spread of Lassa fever by complying with guidelines to stay healthy and safe.

"Wash your hands frequently with soap and water; avoid contact with rat urine or feces; avoid consuming contaminated food or water and seek medical attention immediately if you experience any symptoms of Lassa fever, such as fever, headache, muscle pain, and weakness."

TINUBU: PETROL SCARCITY, NAIRA REDESIGN PLOY TO SABOTAGE MY VICTORY IN THE ELECTION

"It is unfortunate that Asiwaju Tinubu is trying to hoodwink Nigerians by seeking to exonerate himself and blame others in the Buhari led-APC administration from the biting fuel scarcity in the country, when in reality he (Asiwaju Tinubu) is known to be behind the insensitive and anti-people policies that have brought so much calamity to our country, including the current persistent fuel scarcity.

"It, indeed, speaks volumes of Asiwaju Tinubu's character that while he is reported to be hugely involved in the corruption in the petroleum sector, which had led to the fuel crisis, he is pretending to care for the pains Nigerians are passing through just because it was beginning to affect his political life ambition.

"Furthermore, it is clear that Asiwaju Tinubu is lamenting over the redesigning of the naira just because the policy has frustrated his boastful plots to use slush fund, which he reportedly stashed away in secret vaults, for vote buying and manipulative schemes, including alleged funding of thugs to compromise the integrity of the 2023 presidential election through the setting up of the Jagaban Army.

"Of course, only politicians who have always won elections by relying on bullion vans have become troubled over the CBN monetary policy to redesign the naira."

Court Strikes Out Saraki's Suits against EFCC, ICPC, Others

Alex Enumah in Abuja

Justice Inyang Ekwo of a Federal High Court (FHC), Abuja, yesterday, struck out two separate suits filed by a former Senate President, Dr. Bukola Saraki, against the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and others.

Ekwo struck out the suits for lack of diligent prosecution.

Saraki had dragged the anti-graft agencies to court over their decision to probe his tenure as Governor of Kwara State between 2003 and 2011.

The anti-graft commission was reported to have seized some of his houses in the Ikoyi area of Lagos at the time.

Defendants in the two separate suits marked: FHC/ABJ/CS/507/2019 and FHC/ABJ/CS/508/2019, included the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF), Inspector-General of Police and State Security Service (SSS), EFCC, Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB).

Upon resumed hearing in the matters, neither Saraki's lawyer nor defendants' counsel were in court for the proceeding.

Ekwo, while stating that the cases were not diligently prosecuted, however, struck out the suits for lack of diligent prosecution.

Saraki had on May 10, 2019, filed the two separate suits before Justice Taiwo Taiwo (rtd) to challenge the action of the EFCC.

Justice Taiwo, who was the presiding judge at the time, ruled on an ex-parte application filed along with the substantive suits.

The judge ordered the anti-corruption agency (4th respondent) and the other five respondents to the suits to stay action on the probe pending the hearing and determination of the motion on notice filed by the applicant.

The order was granted after Sunday Onubi, Saraki's lawyer, moved the application, on May 14, 2019.

The court then directed the parties to maintain the status quo by suspending the probe.

But the EFCC later applied that the judge should recuse himself and the matter be transferred to another court.

In turn, Justice Taiwo sent back the case file to the chief judge and the matter was reassigned to Justice Anwuli Chikere for adjudication.

When the matter came up on July 14, 2021 before Justice Chikere, EFCC Counsel, Chile Okoronkwo, complained that Taiwo's order had hindered the agency "from performing its duty for about two years now."

The lawyer, who stated that Saraki continued to stand on the order of the court any time he was invited, urged the court to vacate the order.

But the suits were reassigned to Justice Ekwo following the retirement of Chikere.

NEWS

REMEMBERING PROFESSOR OYE IBIDAPO-OBE...

L-R: Wife of the late former Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Mrs Olusola Ibidapo-Obe; Daughter and Non-Executive Director, Zenith Bank Plc, Dr. Mobola Ibidapo-Obe Ogunfowora; Daughter and Assistant Professor of Family Medicine at the University of Texas Medical Branch, Dr Oyetokunbo Ibidapo-Obe Somorin, and a family member, Mrs. Iyabo Adebanjo, at the second year remembrance of late Emeritus Professor Oyewusi Ibidapo-Obe, at Ilesha, Osun State

Civil Society Coalition Seeks Extension of PVC Collection to February 5

Onyebuchi Ezigbo in Abuja

The Nigeria Civil Society Coalition (Situation Room) has asked the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to extend the Ward level collection of Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) to February 5, 2023 to enable more people collect their PVCs.

It urged the commission to also deploy more staff to the Ward centres to ease distribution of PVCs and fasten the process.

The coalition said INEC's failure to keep its promise of getting PVCs ready in October and November 2022, for people who took part in the last quarter of the Continuous Voter Registration was responsible for the high numbers being witnessed at the collection centres

In a statement jointly signed by the Convener, Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, Ene Obi, Co-Conveners, Asma'u Joda and James Ugochukwu, the coalition said several complaints have trailed the distribution of PVCs at the ward level, most which bordered on unavailability of PVCs for both new and old registrants without a future date for collection.

The group said there were reports of INEC staff not permanently located at the Wards during the exercise.

It said in most States, the INEC staff were roving from Ward to Ward without a clear schedule for visit to Wards and that when people turned up, they met their absence.

"Going by the INEC calendar on distribution of PVCs, the Local Government Area distribution at INEC offices is set to end on 29th January 2023. Situation Room is worried that the timelines given to people who have been asked to return to collect their PVCs are unrealistic and would lead to disenfranchisement.

"On 13th January 2023, Situation Room called on the Commission to extend the Ward level collection to 5th February 2023 to enable more people collect their PVCs with ease and also deploy more staff to the Ward centres to ease distribution of PVCs and fasten the process.

Presidency Tasked to Review Act Establishing NDDC, Regional Masterplan

Okon Bassey in Uyo

The presidency has been told to initiate the process of amending the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Act 2000 to bring it in line with current challenges and realities in the region.

The call was contained in a communique issued at the end of a four-day retreat in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State's capital, by the NDDC for the new board members and management team of the commission.

Participants at the retreat also argued that the Niger Delta Regional Masterplan should be revisited and reviewed having expired in 2020, to provide sustainable focus for the region. The 20-point communique signed by the governing board of the NDDC, demanded a clear definition of roles and responsibilities of both the Ministry and the commission.

"There should be effective, strategic, timely communication and feedback between the ministry and the board.

"There should be due adherence to all extant Rules and Regulations, especially the NDDC Act and other government circulars as applicable to MDAs.

"There should be continuous orientation and training on standards, procedure and guidelines regulating the relationship between ministries and statutory boards.

"That statutory thresholds and due process requirements regarding procurement processes should be strictly complied with, to ensure improvement in the commission's procurement process.

NASENI: Buhari to Inaugurate Lafia Agric Machinery Institute Feb

Igbawase Ukumba in Lafia

President Muhammadu Buhari is expected to inaugurate the newly built Agricultural Machinery and Equipment Development Institute (AMEDI) in Lafia when he visits Nasarawa State on February 4, 2023.

President Buhari will be in the state on February 4, 2023, to launch the campaign of the All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential candidate, Asiwaju Ahmed Tinubu, in the state.

The Executive Vice Chairman of the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI), Prof Mohammed Sani Haruna, disclosed this yesterday at the Government House in Lafia after meeting with the state Governor, Abdullahi Sule, as part of the arrangement for the inauguration.

He said while in the state, Buhari will inaugurate the agricultural institute which targeted 10 million jobs for unemployed Nigerian youths.

According to the NASENI boss, "The civil work is completed. What we are trying to round off now is the installation of machines and other equipment. So the site is ready; it can even be even be inaugurated today.

"Operation of the institute is going to commence immediately after the inauguration, but we are not going to recruit fresh people for the site. We are posting people from different institute of NASENI, who are experienced to commence operation and standardised how work can go on in the site.

Protect Children from Abuse, Violence, Exploitation, Group Tells Govt

Fidelis David in Akure

A United Kingdom democracy strengthening organisation, Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), yesterday called on government at all levels to provide a safe and conducive environment that will aid the growth of Nigeria children and protect them from neglect, abuse, violence, and exploitation.

WFD Country Representative in Nigeria, Mr. Adebowale Olorunmola, stated this in Akure the Ondo State capital, while addressing representatives of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on how to sensitise the public and students to the Violence Against Persons(Prohibition) law and the drafted Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy in the state.

Olorunmola explained that the foundation is working with support from OSAA-GBV in ensuring all residents of the state are aware of and understand the content of the law and the policy.

His words: "This is a continuation of the efforts at advancing the process of implementation. The participants here today are from the various and relevant agencies that are going to be working together to implement not only the VAPP law but the draft Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy when it is eventually assented by Governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu.

Dickson Advises Politicians against Inciting Comments

A former Governor of Bayelsa State, Sen. Henry Seriake Dickson yesterday called on political actors to avoid inciting comments which can lead to crisis and pleaded with Nigerians to support the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies for a free and fair poll.

Dickson, who spoke with newsmen after a vocational motivation session at the Fellowship of the Rotary Club of Abuja Maitama, also said Naira redesign should be left to the next government to avoid any effect on the forthcoming poll.

Regarding next month's election, Dickson said Nigerians should avoid division along ethnic lines.

He said: "I am calling on Nigerians not to allow themselves to be divided across ethnic lines and religious divides. Political leaders should bear in mind the primacy of preserving peace, stability, and peace in our country, while we sort out our issues and while we disagree.

"Also, political actors should not make themselves disagreeable while disagreeing. You can disagree without being disagreeable. We should realise that in every world, every action has consequences and repercussions. I condemn every uncivil comment or attack on candidates generally.

"No one is justified in doing so, no supporter is justified in doing so; nobody is justified in inciting, in making statements that can create confusion or crises.

NGO Calls for Inclusion of Current Situation in New Curriculum

Kuni Tyessi in Abuja

In support of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Chief Executive Officer of Transformational Parenteen Academy, Ms. Mute Olori, has called on the federal government to include current happenings in schools curriculum and equip teachers in line with current state of things in the country.

Olori spoke yesterday in Abuja at the Teen Leader Shift Conference with the theme "Engaging the Future in the Present," which was organised by Teen Leadership Network (TOFNation), a non-governmental organisation.

She said with the use of such tools, student are better equipped to face and solve future challenges, while noting that soft skills sells and is needed in all the sectors of the economy.

Olori said: "We need to start by disabusing their minds and one way to do so is by changing the curriculum. More things should be added in it. Teachers should be equipped and they must be current. Let them use the current situation to teach the students in such a way that when they taught mathematics, they are also taught how to convert the calculations into solving problems. When we begin to do that, education will have the prestige that it expected of it.

"Soft skill sells. Peoples ability to solve problems and be innovative, made people to make money and be known and were able to sell their talent. If we can teach people that with their certificates, they can be entrepreneurs, in school, they should be equipped with the right tools of who they are and how they have been wired."

Asaba Monarch Wants LG Administration Back to Traditional Institutions

The Asagba of Asaba, Prof. Chike Edozien, has called for the return of local government administration in the country to traditional institutions for effective governance.

The Asagba made the call while receiving the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar and members of the Presidential Campaign Council at his palace in Asaba yesterday.

He blamed the rising poverty and insecurity in Nigeria to the collapse of local government administration, saying that the situation needed to be addressed.

"I have watched for the past days, the campaign of the PDP here in Asaba, and today, you have continued to commission projects in Asaba and has given us the opportunity of receiving you.

"For many years, we remember that you have always associated with us and we are also delighted not only for this long standing association, but that you have selected one of our sons, our governor, to be your running mate. "We thank you and we appreciate that choice. We wish you the best in this election and when you succeed, there are one or two things we expect of you and it is my responsibility to remind you.

"By all yardsticks in the economy of the world, Nigeria is not a poor country, but unfortunately, the statistics show that Nigeria is one of the largest poverty capitals of the world.

Adeleke Woos Investors and Partners to Osun

Yinka Kolawole in Osogbo

The Executive Governor of Osun State, Senator Ademola Adeleke, has intensified his drive for enhanced partnership with local and multinational companies for direct investment in the state economy.

Governor Adeleke was on a working visit to Lagos State since Monday.

For the past two working days, the governor has laid out the vision of his government for a public-private partnership relationship with a view to address the huge infrastructure deficit in his state and jump start the state economy that is weighed down by heavy debt.

In several meetings with captains of industry and chieftains of multilateral institutions and organisations, Adeleke specifically solicited investment on roads, agriculture, education, health, sports and information technology.

From Monday to Wednesday, the Governor met over 14 chief executives of various organisations, securing commitment from them to work on investment packages for Osun State.

IDENTIFYING WITH ROTARIANS...

The President-elect, Rotary Club of Abuja, Maitama, Ijeoma Joyce Agwu; immediate past President, Victoria Unoarumi; President, Yusuf Alli; former Bayelsa State Governor, Sen. Henry Seriake Dickson; past Rotary Assistant Governor, Winny Fonaka; Charter President, Princess Joy Nkiru Okoro; Assistant Governor, Eucheria Ekweozoh, and past President, Dinah Akuh, presenting Rotary's Four-Way Test to Dickson after a talk at the Fellowship of the Rotary Club in Abuja ...yesterday

Prevail on Tinubu to Quit Presidential Race, Kachikwu Tells Buhari

Sunday Aborisade in Abuja

The presidential candidate of the African Democratic Congress (ADC), Mr. Dumebi Kachikwu has appealed to President Muhammadu Buhari to prevail on the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Tinubu to withdraw from the presidential race.

Kachikwu, who addressed a press conference in Abuja, after a two weeks isolation due to the coronavirus, alleged that, "Tinubu has no business being in this race or continuing this race."

He lamented that the country was in the current mess because Buhari's government failed to deliver on its electoral promises to Nigerians when his health failed him on assumption of office in 2015.

He warned against the repeat of what Nigerians were currently experiencing under Buhari by prevailing on the APC candidate to quit the race.

Kachikwu noted that he was not against an older person contesting election, but that he wasn't comfortable with "a candidate with significant cognitive disabilities embarrassing my nation and making a mockery of the entire political process. "

He said, "Eight years ago, there was palpable tension in our land as the fever of change gripped Nigerians, mostly our youths. Anything and anybody but President Jonathan they said.

"The APC skillfully manipulated the minds and emotions of Nigerians and successfully delivered a so-called reformed dictator as president of Nigeria.

"Eight years later, we now know that when people say change, we should ask change in what direction. Even children don't want to hear the word change.

"We are in this mess because we don't question anything as a people. We are apathetic to politics and governance.

"We fail to see the connection between government, governance and our lives because for too long the Nigerian government has merely existed in name to the Nigerian people."

He added: "I personally believe that President Buhari had some good intentions in mind when he ran for office but alas when his health failed, his government also failed.

"Today, the same APC that failed the Nigerian people monumentally with a sick president has presented another sick candidate to the Nigerian people.

Bauchi APC Guber Promises to End Hunger, Empower People

Segun Awofadeji in Bauchi

The governorship candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Bauchi State, Air Marshal Sadique Baba Abubakar (rtd), has stated that he is in the governorship race to change the negative narrative in the state by ensuring that he ends hunger and poverty, provide job opportunities, improve security and empower the people of the state.

Abubakar, who stated this yesterday while fielding questions from journalists at his residence in Bauchi, declared that if elected the governor of the state, he would ensure that the state has a functional educational system that would provide equal opportunity for everyone to be educated and not based on those who have the resources to afford it.

He pointed out that the APC in the state does not need to spill blood or fight in order to win elections, saying if elected the governor of the state, his administration will dismantle the system that failed to improve the living conditions of the people.

The APC candidate stated that the only way to have a secured society is to eliminate hindrances that stop people from accessing education, emphasising that he was in the governorship race to change the negative narrative in the state by ensuring that he ends hunger and poverty, provide job opportunities, improve security and empower the citizens.

Police Arrest Woman for Allegedly Killing Step Son

George Okoh in Makurdi

The Benue State Police Command has arrested a woman suspected to have killed her 10-year-old stepson, Fanen Yange.

A statement issued yesterday and signed by the state Command Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Catherine Anene, said on January 23, 2023, a case of culpable homicide was reported at E Police Division, Makurdi, and a team of detectives was deployed immediately.

"Preliminary investigation reveals that the deceased, Fanen Yange, 10, of International Market Area, Makurdi, was alleged by his stepmother, Mrs. Upev, to have stolen meat from the pot, and consequently beaten him up during the early hours of the day, but when the victim went to sleep at night, he could not wake up."

Fanen was later confirmed dead by a doctor, and his corpse was deposited at the Bishop Murray Hospital morgue in Makurdi for autopsy.

The police spokesperson said the suspect is in police custody and investigation is ongoing.

Slain Lawyer Posed No Threat before Vandi Shot Her, Says Police Witness

Wale Igbintade

Justice Ibironke Harrison of the Lagos High Court was yesterday told that the occupants in the Toyota Venza conveying the late Lagos-based lawyer, Mrs. Omobolanle Raheem, posed no threat to the Police or the public when they were shot at by an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Drambi Vandi.

Testifying in the ongoing trial of ASP Drambi Vandi, a prosecution witness, Inspector Fiyegha Ebimine said the late Omobolanle Raheem and other occupants posed no threat to him, his colleagues or the public when their car drove past them.

Responding to questions from Lagos State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Mr. Moyo Onigbanjo, SAN, the witness said the occupants in the car were peaceful.

Onigbanjo asked "As the Toyota Venza drove past, was there any threat to your life?"

Ebimine: "No, no, no, no."

Onigbanjo: "As the Venza approached, was there any threat to the general public?"

Ebimine: "No, they were peaceful there."

Meanwhile, deceased's husband Gbenga Raheem and her sister are expected to testify before the court today (Thursday).

Justice Ibironke Harrison fixed the date after concluding the testimonies of the first two prosecution witnesses, Mr. Matthew Ameh and Mr. Fiyegha Ebimine – both Police Inspectors.

Makinde Campaigns in Saki East, Promises to Develop Mineral Resources

Oyo State governor, 'Seyi Makinde, yesterday announced that his administration would construct Ogbooro to Agbonle, if re- elected for a second term.

The governor, who stated this while campaigning at Ogboro and Agbonle areas of Saki East Local Government, also declared that his administration will develop the mineral resources in the state.

The governor, who met with the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) at the First Baptist Church, Ago Amodu, the League of Imams, at the Central Mosque, behind Maternity Centre, Ago Amodu, urged the religious leaders to support the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and its candidates in National Assembly, state Assembly and governorship elections.

A statement by the Chief Press Secretary to the governor, Mr. Taiwo Adisa, on behalf of the Media Committee of Governor Makinde's reelection campaign council, quoted the governor as saying that he was seeking re-election so as to consolidate the gains of the past 44 months.

Fuel Price Hike: CSOs Threaten Mass Protest in Rivers

Blessing Ibunge in Port Harcourt

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Rivers State have threatened to embark on a mass protest if the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) and security agencies do not resolve the issue arising from the fuel price hike in the state.

Lamenting the plight of the residents of the state, the group warned that after the next 14 days if the fuel hike persists, they would shutdown the state with their massive protest.

Chairman of CSOs in the State, Mr. Enefaa Georgewill, said they suspended the protest after security agencies, particularly the Department of State Services(DSS), intervened and opted for more time.

He said DSS has assured that they were working with NNPCL to restore normalcy, warning that if after 24 days, "fuel price does not revert to official price of N165 per litre, there will be a mother of all protest and we will not listen to anybody."

Georgewill said: "What is happening here is a warning protest to NNPC to stop suffocating and punishing Rivers people by allowing petrol marketers to sell fuel above the government approved pump price.

"Since yesterday, security agencies have been on our neck that we shouldn't carryout this protest. Protest is a part of our democracy and it is the duty of the citizens to freely express themselves by way of protest."

Nasarawa Bombings: Nobody Has Claimed Responsibility, Says Gov Sule

Alex Enumah in Abuja and **Igbawase Ukumba** in Lafia

The Governor of Nasarawa State, Abdullahi Sule, last night stated that nobody had claimed responsibility for the air attacks that resulted to the loss of lives in the state.

An air raid was reported to have occurred early hours of Wednesday wherein scores of lives were said to have been lost and many others sustained various levels of injuries.

Majority of the deceased were said to be Fulani herders who were said to be returning from neighbouring Benue State where they had gone to retrieve some of their cows seized for breaching the anti-grazing law in that state.

Speaking on the ARISE Channels News evening programme, the governor said contrary to earlier reports, the Air Force was not responsible for the attacks, adding that the bombings wwere carried out by a drone.

Responding to question whether any arrest has been made, governor Sule said: "It will be difficult to arrest anyone at the moment."

NGO Decries Increase in Number of Out-of-school Girl-child in Kwara

Hammed Shittu in Ilorin

A non-governmental organisation based in Kwara State, Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (BBYDI), has expressed concern about the increase in the number of out-of-school girl-child in the state, especially in the rural area of the state.

The organisation, therefore, advised the government at all levels to embark on initiative or programmes that will encourage girl-child education, especially in the rural communities.

It also called on parents to give equal opportunities to both the girl and boy children to learn-one child should not be placed above another.

The Executive Director of the organisation, Miss Nurah Jimoh-Sanni, disclosed this in Ilorin yesterday at a news conference on the sideline of the launch of research document on 'Girl Child Education' in the state to mark the International Day of Education.

She said: "There is the need to prioritise the girl-child education because she is a teacher of teachers, her education should not be sacrificed at the expense of the education of others by virtue of her being a girl.

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Napoli Set to 'Break Bank' to Keep Osimhen Away from Prying Eyes

Victor Osimhen...Napoli planning to increase his wages to stop him leaving this winter transfer window

Duro Ikhazuagbe

After 14 goals in 19 games to become the top scorer in Italy so far this season, Serie A leaders, Napoli, are set to put aside their wage cap to ensure their prized forward, Victor Osimhen, remains in Naples for another season.

The Super Eagles striker is perhaps, the second hottest goal scorer in Europe at the moment after Erling Haaland and has been on the radar of top clubs in this January transfer window.

According to reports in Italian medium, AreaNapoli, Coach Luciano Spalletti and Napoli board are in discussions to exceed the club's salary wage limit of €3.5million per year per player to ensure that Osimhen stays back to continue the club's search for their first Scudetto in 33 years.

Napoli are on top of the Italian topflight on 50 points from 19 matches. Second placed AC Milan are 12 points below Napoli on 38 points from same numbers of matches.

AreaNapolireports that Napoli are prepared to offer Osimhen €7million per year which is double the club's ceiling to ensure the Nigerian international stays happy at Naples while his agents turn their eyes away from some of the juicy offers coming their ways.

English Premier League giants, Manchester United, until recently were the leading contender for Osimhen's signature. However, the Red Devils are believed to have slowed their quest because of reported asking prize tag of $100million places on him by Napoli.

Although Napoli and Osimhen's representatives are yet to finalize on the likelihood of more cash for the Nigerian, other sources in Italy hinted THISDAY at the weekend that any offer in the excesses of $100million will be too juicy for the Italian league leaders to reject.

At just 24 years, Osimhen is believed to be amongst the world's best strikers at the moment. He has the pace and is a powerful finisher in front of goal.

He proved it in France with Lille and is now restating his pedigree in a much more challenging league in Italy.

Osimhen has a career goals record of 80 in 171 games. With age still very much on his side, the Nigerian striker is capable of reaching in excesses of 200 goals if he continues at this rate.

Although some former Manchester United stars have insisted Osimhen was not worth the $100 million tag on him by Napoli, several other pundits have countered that were he a European player, perhaps, he could have been valued more. They cited other younger English players of less quality than Osimhen commanding higher prize tags.

Remo Win 'Stars War' against Shooting in Ikenne

SOUTHWEST DERBY

Femi Solaja

Alex Aghahowa's own goal and clinical finishing by Godwin Odibo in the 70th minute gave the home side, Remo Stars 2-0 win against Shooting Stars of Ibadan yesterday in Ikenne.

The win shot Remo Stars to the top of the log in Group A ahead of the 'Top of the Table' clash with Bendel Insurance FC on Saturday at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in Benin City.

Remo Stars began yesterday's tie-on front foot but the Shooting Stars lads were equal to the task with better midfield play that neutralised the striking power of Andy Okpe.

Dayo Ojo's miss in the 24th minute was the first shot on goal as the home side looked desperate to get the lead.

However, Shooting Stars got the lead in the 30th minute but the goal was overruled by the referee for an infringement leading to the goal.

Ojo missed another one-on-one chance with the goalkeeper in the 35th minute and two minutes later, Samuel Anakwe missed another that could have given the home side the lead.

Okpe, in the starting line up for the first time this season missed another in the 52nd minute as he failed to connect Ojo with the goalkeeper already beaten.

Remo Stars however broke the deadlock in the 60th minute as onrushing Shooting stars defender, Alex Aghahowa, cleared the ball into his own net for the dominant home side to take the lead.

The home side wrapped up the match in the 72nd minute as Godwin Odibo came off the bench to finish a pass from Okpe.

The result means only Remo Stars and Bendel Insurance are maintain winning runs this season. Both teams will however go head long this Saturday in Benin for the three points at stake.

Remo Stars are yet to concede a goal and the encounter will revive the bitter rivalry between the two teams. Vengeance will be in the air in Benin City if you recall that It was Remo Stars that denied Insurance promotion to the NPFL during the playoffs in Enugu two years ago.

Oshoala's First Hat Trick of the Season Inspires Barca Femeni to Record Feat

Super Falcons Asisat Oshoala's scored her first hat trick of the season yesterday as Barcelona Femeni hammered Levante Las Planas 7-0 to set world record of 50 straight league wins in the Spanish Primera Liga F.

According to nigeriafootball.ng, Barcelona had won its previous 49 league games and knew that a win at home against Las Planas will make it the first football club (men or women) to win 50 straight league games.

The Catalan side started the game in the best possible manner as Ana-Maria Crnogorcevic opened the scoring for the host in the seventh minute from Fridolina Rolfo's assist.

In the 25th minute, Crnogorcevic set up Oshoala for the Blaugrana's second goal and Crnogorcevic scored her second goal of the game to lift Jonatan Giraldez's to a 3-0 lead four minutes before halftime.

The 2020/2021 UEFA Women's Champions League winners started the second half in the same imperious goal-scoring form as Vicky Lopez increased its lead to four within the first three minutes after the restart.

Five-time African Footballer of the year, Oshoala scored two more goals in the 56th and 63rd minutes to complete her hat-trick before Marion Caldentey completed the rout with the seventh goal to propel Barcelona to a big win.

Oshoala lasted the entire duration of the game increased her goal tally to 10 in the league this season with an assist. With 95 goals, the Nigerian becomes the fourth all time highest goalscoring in the club's history.

On the other hand, Rita Chikwelu also saw the full 90 minutes for Las Planas and received a yellow card in the 27th minute

FC Barcelona top the league log with a maximum of 45 points after 15 games and will attempt to extend their winning streak in their next game against Monday Gift's Granadilla Tenerife on January 29.

Asisat Oshoala (second right) celebrating her first hat trick of the season yesterday

Three Referees Suspended from NPFL for Questionable Officiating

In line with its avowed determination to cleanse the Nigerian Premier Football League (NPFL) of malfeasance, the Referee's Committee of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) has ordered the suspension of three referees from further officiating in the ongoing abridged league.

Yesterday, Secretary of the Referees' Committee, Sani Zubairu, announced in a statement that the three referees, namely; Ndubuisi Ukah (Imo), Otuwho Morrison (Delta) and Faro Abdulrahman (Lagos) have been suspended .

"The following referees are hereby suspended until they appear before the Referee's Committee for explanation on what happened in the matches they were involved as follows: Ukah and Morrison (Delta) officiated Shooting Stars v Kwara United while Abdulrahman was in charge of the Rivers United v Niger Tornadoes clash.

Unlike in previous seasons, officiating of games have been commendable with teams going away to win matches without incidents of crowd violence.

It is expected that the decision to put these three match officials in the cooler until they purge themselves of questionable calls, is meant to sound warnings to the others that this particular season is different from business as usual.

Laureus Sports, FAME Foundation Sign One Year Partnership

A Non-Governmental Organisation, FAME Foundation, has entered into a one-year partnership with Laureus Sport for Good, to achieve a common goal, using the power of sports for change under the 'Play it Dream it' initiative of the organisation.

'Play it Dream it' Initiative is aimed at using sports as a tool for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, improving access to quality and affordable education, reducing early marriage, promote gender equality and sports participation, and contribute to the reduction in inequalities among children and young adults in Nigeria.

Laureus Sports for Good, a London based not-for-profit and global organisation, celebrates sporting excellence and uses the power of sport to transform the lives of children and young people around the world.

The partnership will enable both organisations to take advantage of their collective strength and reach out to wider audiences, transform lives and also bring development to the people.

Also, it unifies the idea of women and girls coming together through sports to better themselves and also the society.

"Our focus is to advocate alongside the people, amplify their voices, and bring them closer to where they can access the relevant support, participate in their development and ultimately, sustainably exit their crises and we are elated at this partnership with Laureus Sports, and with optimism, we look forward to the outstanding growth that will be achieved by the organisations and the project beneficiaries," says Executive Director, FAME Foundation, Ms Aderonke Ogunleye-Bello.

She said that the project will be reaching young children; boys and girls aged 7-17, through the several activities like Football for Development, and other sports, aiming at 200 displaced children that will participate in the project's weekly and monthly sporting activities and exercises, including mentorship and empowerment programmes.

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MISSILE

Tommy Etim to Governors

="Governors are the enemies of this country. It is highly unfortunate that state assemblies are also culprit in this matter. It shows the kind of individuals that they have. For years, local governments, council chairmen have become a rubber stamp. They don't get anything. Why should state governors be interested in the money that is meant to go to local government councils?"—TUC Deputy President, over failure to pass the local government autonomy bill in the ongoing constitutional amendment exercise.

OLUSEGUN ADENIYI
THE VERDICT
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Atiku/Tinubu: Please, Grow Up!

Street wisdom dictates that those in glass houses don't walk naked. This seems lost on Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar. The ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential candidate and the flagbearer of the main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) have allowed their media managers to trade damaging allegations that question their own character and integrity. Each side has succeeded in painting the candidate of the other party as a criminal who is unworthy of the position being sought. While some Nigerians may be enjoying the entertainment, the tragedy of our situation is that either of these two septuagenarians could end up as our next president in a matter of weeks.

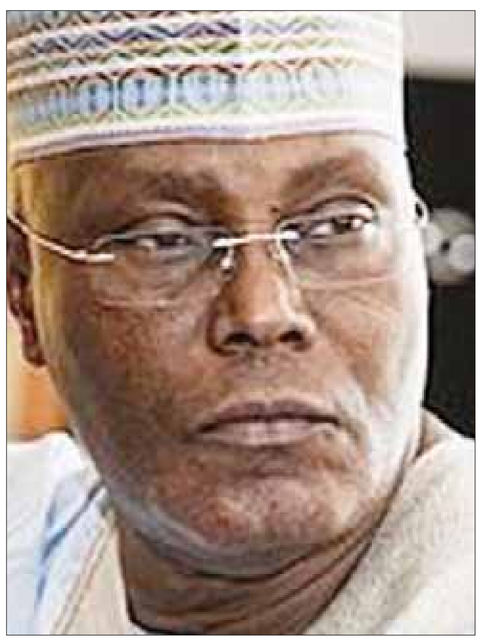
I once likened accusation and counteraccusation of impropriety by Nigerian politicians during campaign periods to the African folklore of three famished brothers eating from the same plate of food. Apparently losing out in the game of greed, the first brother remarked to no one in particular: 'You are eating too fast'. To this, the second brother responded: 'So you saw him'. The third brother completed the farce: 'That was exactly what I wanted to say'!

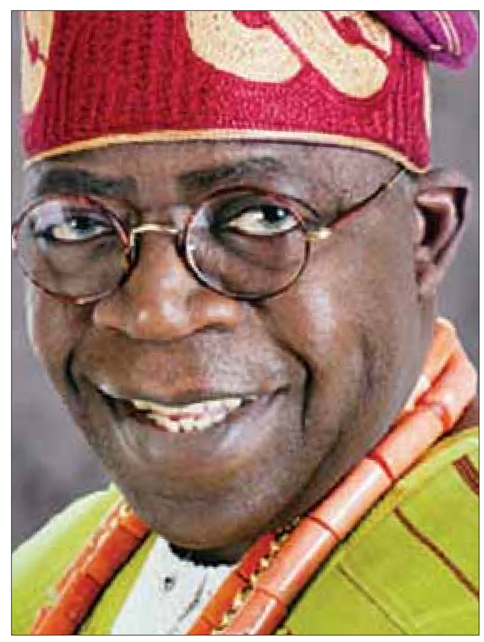
The current circus started with the allegation by Michael Achimugu, a former aide to Atiku. In a video post that is making the rounds on WhatsApp and other social media platforms, Achimugu spoke about the sum of N100 million allegedly paid into a 'Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)' for misappropriating public funds at a time he (Atiku) was vice president. Achimugu revealed other damaging things about Atiku, buttressing his claims with the audio of an incriminating conversation purportedly held with his former boss.

Hardly had the allegation hit the internet when spokesman for the APC Presidential Campaign Council, Festus Keyamo, went on media offensive. He also filed a writ of summons at the Federal High Court in Abuja asking that the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) be compelled to investigate, invite and/or arrest Atiku over the allegation. What followed was predictable. The Atiku/Okowa Presidential Campaign Organisation called on the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the EFCC to arrest and prosecute Tinubu over lingering drug peddling and money laundering allegations. Referencing Tinubu's 1993 alleged money laundering and drug-related case in the United States, Atiku's media team, including Dele Momodu and Daniel Bwala, said should the APC candidate win, "Nigerians will be plunged into a drug crisis that would make the Colombia situation a child's play." They also threw up sundry allegations of corruption and cronyism.

The APC and PDP have shared power at the centre and in the majority of the 36 states since the advent of the current democratic dispensation 24 years ago. That ordinarily should impose a measure of responsibility. So, if all that their presidential candidates have to offer in this election season are insults, abuses, and damaging allegations, then Nigerians should be concerned. What their campaigns are invariably telling the electorate is that a choice of either would be a democratic endorsement of the crimes and vices they are accusing each other of.

In their journal article on 'Negative Campaign', Richard R. Lau and Ivy Brown Rovner of the Department of Political Science, Rutgers University, New Jersey, United States argued that one of the most important decisions candidates make is "whether to run on their own merits—that is, their own policy ideas, past accomplishments, and personal strengths, which most observers would call a 'positive' appeal; or if instead their campaign will concentrate on the perceived weaknesses of their opponent's policy proposals, prior policy failures, and/or personal peccadilloes", which they described as a 'negative' appeal. Minders of the two parties prefer the latter.


Atiku


Tinubu

Let me be clear here. As a journalist, I am aware that mudslinging could sometimes take the moral dimension of exposing the weakness of the other candidate in a sort of 'buyers beware' warning for voters. But most reasonable Nigerians are also aware that neither of these two candidates can genuinely throw stones. That is not even my concern. Whichever direction we look today, Nigeria is at a most challenging period in history. And with mounting debts amid low revenues, prospects for the future don't look good either. So, we need those who aspire for leadership, especially at the highest level, to tell us how they intend to address the myriad of challenges that we currently grapple with and the ones that are bound to come.

The point we cannot ignore in this sordid drama is that when politicians lack depth of insight on pressing national issues, they revert to low level gutter snipes. With the language of political exchange drenched in mud, vitriol, and dirt, even the institutions of democratic society like the judiciary, police, security agencies etc are not safe. Besides, in the case of the two presidential candidates, many would have concluded that their exchanges are very revealing of who they are.

That two friends and associates of more than three decades can descend to this level of desperation is to put it mildly unfortunate. The real danger is how that could be transmitted to their followers when the election doesn't go their way and the prospect of post-election violence. Yet, when aides get carried away by the excitement of the moment, that is when the adults in the room must show up to call them to order and draw the line. Therefore, it is in the enlightened self-interest of both Tinubu and Atiku to have some quiet words with their campaign managers. They must embrace a more sensible rule of engagement.

The Drama at Abuja Glo Office

When I saw my friend, Arinze Anapugars, Senior Communications Manager at Globacom, in an animated discussion with a group of officials last Friday at their Abuja head office where I had gone to resolve a pending issue with customer care, I knew something was amiss. It turned out that they were having a problem convincing the winner of a three-bedroom house in the Globacom 'Festival of Joy' promotion that it was for real. The young man chose to play Thomas and for 24 hours made life difficult not only for Glo staff but also the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC) officials who were witnesses to the promo.

As Arinze explained to me, the drama started last Thursday when following the draw, the number of Rilwan Ajamu Bello was picked. A call was immediately put to him from the venue of the draw. When told he had won a house in the Glo promo, the young man expressed no excitement. "Ok, thank you" was all he reportedly said. Prompted further by the Glo official why he was not excited about his luck, Bello responded sarcastically, "I am excited now, I am happy". Asked to come down to the Glo office where the media and officials of NCC and NLRC were waiting, Bello promised to be there in 20 minutes as his office was not far away. One hour turned to two without the winner. Several other calls were made to Bello who kept playing the officials, apparently having concluded that it was a hoax.

When Glo officials realized Bello didn't believe the news that he had won a house, they asked him to provide his WhatsApp number for a video call so he could see the small crowd that had gathered at their office. Bello claimed he was not on WhatsApp. Asked to provide the WhatsApp number of a nearby friend or colleague, he replied, "I don't know anyone who uses WhatsApp". When a Glo official explained to Bello why he needed to show up to complete the documentation process ahead of the presentation ceremony planned for the next day, he promised to be on his way. But the next thing he did was block the number that was used in calling him.

At this point, the Head of Glo Customer Care in Abuja, Aisha Garba, called Bello from another number to explain the genuineness of the win. Bello made the same promise that he would be with them. After about an hour and no sight of him, Bello was called up again. This time, Bello said he needed to secure permission from his boss before he could leave the office. When Aisha told him to hand the phone over to his boss or give her the number of the person, Bello then claimed his boss was not around.

Further interventions by the NCC and NLRC officials to convince the 28-year-old Mathematics graduate of Ekiti State University that he had indeed won a house in the Glo promo were to no avail. Messrs Adekanye Sunday and Iheanachor Chikodi of NLRC as well as Ibrahim Mahmud of NCC all took turns to speak to Bello on phone to persuade him to come over to Glo office. While Adekanye spoke to Bello in Yoruba, Mahmud spoke to him in Hausa language, since he understood and spoke both fluently.

When all these efforts failed to persuade the young man, Glo officials went a step further by looking up his frequently called numbers and then speaking to a friend of his to help talk to Bello that he had indeed won a house and that if he still failed to show up, the draw would be cancelled and another one would be held to select a new winner for the house. That worked. When Bello finally arrived at Gloworld on Aminu Kano Crescent last Friday afternoon, he spent time prostrating to the officials and apologizing for keeping everyone waiting. I was amused by the drama, having decided to wait until Bello's arrival.

However, I have had to reflect on why Bello took so long to believe that he was not being scammed and my conclusion is that it has to do with the trust deficit in our society so we should not blame the young man. We live in a country where many people no longer believe in honest dealings. Because of that, one must be circumspect. Interestingly, there have been scientific studies on this issue. "Would you say that most people can be trusted? Or do you think you need to be very careful in dealing with others?" These were the questions posed by a 2015 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) survey for citizens/residents in member countries as well as in in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, South Africa, Argentina, and Saudi Arabia. In his analysis of the survey report for the World Economic Forum, Alex Gray concluded that "How much people trust each other is an indicator of how cohesive society is as a whole."

Meanwhile, the reality of the Nigerian condition today is that trust is a most abused virtue. There are just too many scammers around. And this is not restricted to just individuals. There are also many unscrupulous organisations in both the private and public sectors that abuse trust. That perhaps explains why our country has become globally renowned for '419' such that a June 2020 statement by the American Department of Justice (DoJ) had these damning lines: "Foreign citizens perpetrate many BEC (Business Email Compromise) scams. Those individuals are often members of transnational criminal organizations, which originated in Nigeria but have spread throughout the world."

For our society to develop and thrive, we must begin to rebuild trust in ourselves and critical institutions.

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