Court Strikes Out Lawsuit on OMLS 123, 124, 126, 137

Assets formally returned to NNPCL

Peter Uzoho

The Federal High Court (Abuja Division), yesterday, struck out the lawsuit concerning OMLs 123, 124, 126 and 137.

The suit with number: FHC/ABJ/CS/1291/2020, was brought by Kaztec Engineering Limited against the Ministry of Petroleum Resources; the Attorney General of the Federation; Mars Exploration and Production Company Ltd; the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission and the Nigerian Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL).

The plaintiff had sought, amongst other things, a Declaration that OMLs 123, 124, 126 & 137 be awarded to them and an order setting aside the award of 51 per cent equity participation in the said OMLs to Mars E & P.

On 28th October 2021, Justice N.E Maha, had issued an interim order directing the parties to the suit (including the Minister of Petroleum Resources and the NUPRC) to maintain the status quo in relation to the said OMLs.

However, in the judgment of

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Inflation Rises to 28.2% on Higher Food, Energy Prices... Page 5

THISDAY

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Soludo, Bello, Abaribe, Others Mourn Late Ex-governor of Anambra State, Ezeife... Page 8

Again, Tinubu Assures Foreign Investors of Easy Fund Repatriation

Says Nigeria remains safe haven for investors *Charges foreign envoys to focus on new investment and trade expansion*

Deji Elumoye in Abuja

President Bola Tinubu has once more assured foreign investors of diligent and predictable fund repatriation and the streamlining of the country's tax system.

The President also implored ambassadors to prioritise the exploration of new frontiers of trade relations that would be mutually beneficial as they carry out their duties in the country.

The President stated this as he received Letters of Credence from the Ambassador of Hungary, Lorand Endreffy; High Commissioner of Rwanda, Christophe Bazivamo, and Ambassador of Ukraine, Ivan Kholostenko, at the State House.

Speaking while receiving the High Commissioner of Rwanda, Tinubu said the long-standing concerns over trapped funds were receiving attention and that the funds will be processed expeditiously for release.

He said: "We are one family on

Continued on page 5

As 10 Commissioners Resign, Fubara Says Mandate to Defend Rivers People

Woos investors, declares state safe for investment
In support of governor, two NASS members lead solidarity walk in P'Harcourt
Ijaw group urges Tinubu to call Wike to order
LP guber candidate sues for peace, says crisis affecting livelihood in Rivers

Blessing Ibunge in Port Harcourt

In what appeared to be a definite public statement since the face-off between him and his benefactor, Rivers State Governor, Mr. Siminalayi Fubara, yesterday, said he was preoccupied with delivering his mandate by attending to the needs of the people and protecting the interest of the State, even as no fewer than 10 members of the State Executive Council have resigned in the past 48 hours.

Fubara, also stressed that he was not interested in fighting anybody.

This came on the heels of two members of the House of Representatives leading a crowd of youths to stage a peaceful solidarity walk in Port Harcourt, in support of Fubara. Member representing Asari Toru/ Akuku Toru federal constituency, Boma Goodhead

Continued on page 5

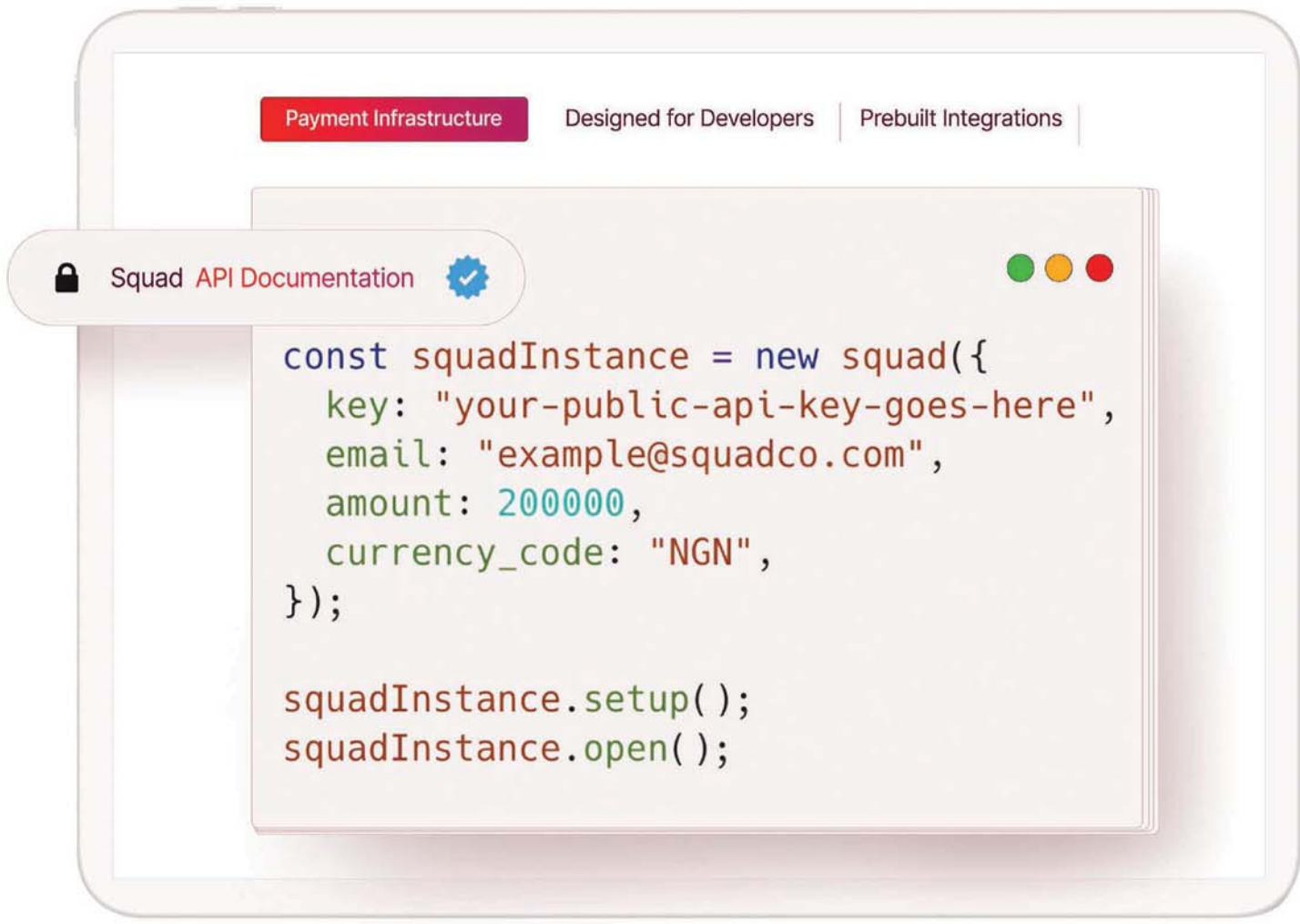


WE FEEL YOUR PAIN...

L-R: Governors of Sokoto, Ahmed Aliyu; Borno, Babagana Umara Zulum; Zamfara, Lawan Dare; Kaduna, Uba Sani; Benue, Hyacinth Alia; Gombe,Inuwa Yahaya and Plateau, Caleb Mufwang, when the Northern States Governors' Forum presented the sum of N180 million to the victims of the tragic bombing incident at Tudun Biri community in Kaduna State...yesterday



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PAGE FIVE

World Bank Approves $750m to Boost Renewable Energy in Nigeria

Ndubuisi Francis in Abuja

In a bid to expand access to clean energy for 17.5 million Nigerians, the World Bank has approved the Nigeria Distributed Access through Renewable Energy Scale-up (DARES) project, being financed by $750 million International Development Association (IDA) credit and would leverage over $1 billion of private capital and significant parallel financing from development partners.

The financing from development partners include $100 million from the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet and $200 million from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Other development partners collaborating on the programme include the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the German Development Agency (GIZ), SEforAll, and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

In a statement yesterday, the World Bank said the DARES project aims to provide over 17.5 million Nigerians with new or improved access to electricity through distributed renewable energy solutions. "The DARES project will use innovative financing solutions to scale up private sector led clean electricity provision in Nigeria.

"As of 2021, over 85 million Nigerians lacked access to electricity; businesses and households with access to the national grid have faced unreliable and insufficient supply, a gap often filled with power from petrol and diesel-run generator sets that are costly and highly polluting to people and the environment.

"To further address the access gap, DARES will build on the achievements of the World Bank-financed Nigeria Electrification Project (NEP), which has supported the establishment of 125 mini grids and the sale of over a million Solar Home Systems, through which more than 5.5 million Nigerians have gained access to electricity.

"NEP has also resulted in the creation of over 5,000 private-sector local green jobs in Nigeria," the statement explained.

According to the global development institution, the DARES programme would enable the Federal Government of Nigeria to coordinate and finance all off-grid electrification efforts and would help states access technical assistance to develop institutional capacity and policy frameworks for rooftop solar.

Also, the programme would prioritise gender and inclusion by building on the NEP's gender-related actions to facilitate access to electricity for disadvantaged female-headed households and women-led MSMEs, as well as actions to increase the employment of women in the energy sector.

"We are committed to expanding clean energy-based access in Nigeria, with the $750 million Nigeria

DARES project being the largest ever single distributed energy project of the World Bank globally.

"It will benefit over 17.5 million unserved, underserved, rural, and remote Nigerians through the deployment of standalone solar and mini grids and replace more than 280,000 polluting and expensive petrol and diesel generator sets, an important step for Nigeria towards achieving its energy transition targets," World Bank Country Director for Nigeria, Shubham Chaudhuri said.

Inflation Rises to 28.2% on Higher Food, Energy Prices

●Severe in Kogi, Lagos, Rivers, others ●FAAC disburses N1.08tn from N1.62tn gross revenue for Nov. ●Balance in excess crude account still $473,754

Ndubuisi Francis and **James Emejo** in Abuja

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) which measures the rate of change in prices of goods and commodities further rose to 28.20 per cent in November compared to 27.33 per cent in the preceding month, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), revealed yesterday.

This was just as the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) yesterday, shared a total sum of N1.089 trillion among the federal, state and local government councils as allocation from a gross revenue of N1.620 trillion for November.

The inflation report showed that year-on-year, headline inflation was also 6.73 per cent higher compared to 21.47 per cent recorded in November 2022.

According to the CPI report for the month under review, month-on-month, the headline index inflation rose to 2.09 per cent compared to 1.73 per cent in October.

In November, food inflation rose to 32.84 per cent year on year compared to 24.13 per cent in 2022. The rise in the food index was attributed to increases in prices of bread and cereals, oil and fat, potatoes, yam and other tubers, fish, fruit, meat, vegetables and coffee, tea and cocoa, potatoes, yam and other tubers.

The core index, which excludes the prices of volatile agricultural produces and energy increased to 22.38 per cent year on year in November compared to 17.99 per cent in 2022.

The highest price increases was recorded in passenger transport by road, medical services, passenger transport by air, actual and imputed rentals for housing, pharmaceutical products, and accommodation service among others. Month-on-month, core inflation rose to 1.53 per cent in November from 1.39 per cent in October.

Meanwhile, urban inflation rose 8.13 per cent to 30.21 per cent year on year compared to the 22.09 per cent in November 2022.

Month-on- month, the index also increased to 2.23 per cent from 1.81 per cent in October. Similarly, rural inflation rose to 26.43 per cent year-on-year, up by 5.55 per cent compared to the 20.88 per cent in November 2022.

Month-on- month, rural inflation increased to 1.99 per cent compared to 1.67 per cent in the preceding month.

At State level, general inflation year on year was highest in Kogi (33.28 per cent), Lagos (32.30 per cent), and Rivers (32.25 per cent), while Borno (22.47 per cent), Katsina (24.91 per cent) and Plateau (25.53 per cent) recorded the slowest rise.

Month-on-month, prices were highest in Kano (3.55 per cent), Kebbi (3.34 per cent), Borno (3.24 per cent), while Taraba (0.74 per cent), Anambra (1.00 per cent) and Enugu (1.18 per cent) recorded the slowest rise.

According to the NBS, year on year, food inflation was highest in Kogi (41.29 per cent), Kwara (40.72 per cent) and Rivers (40.22 per cent), while Bauchi (26.14 per cent), Borno (27.34 per cent) and Jigawa (27.63 per cent) recorded the slowest rise.

Month-on-month, however, Cross River (4.37 per cent), Edo (3.95 per cent) and Rivers (3.91 per cent) recorded the highest increases in food prices while Anambra (0.63 per cent), Oyo (0.91 per cent) and Bauchi (1.00 per cent) recorded the slowest rise.

FAAC Disburses N1.08tn from N1.62tn Gross Revenue for November

Meanwhile, FAAC yesterday shared a total sum of N1.088 trillion to the federal, state and local government councils as allocation from a gross revenue of N1.620 trillion (N1, 620.335 trillion) for November.

The disbursement was made at the FAAC December meeting in Abuja, according to a communique issued by the Committee.

AS 10 COMMISSIONERS RESIGN, FUBARA SAYS MANDATE TO DEFEND RIVERS PEOPLE

and member representing Andoni/Opobo/Nkoro federal constituency, Awaji Inombek Dagomie Abiante led the march.

The resignation of the 10 Commissioners raised speculations of whether they were dumping the Fubara cabinet or were asked to leave. The commissioners who have so far resigned included: Chukwuemeka Woke (Special Duties), Alabo George-Kelly (Works), Isaac Kamalu (Finance) Inime Chinwenwo Aguma (Social Welfare and Rehabilitation), Zaccheaus Adangor (Justice) and Chinedu Mmom (Education). Others are Jacobson Nbina (Transport) and Gift Worlu (Housing), Austin Ben-Chioma (Environment) and Commissioner for Bureau of public procurement in the state.

The Commissioners were said to have been nominees of former governor and Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike and were cabinet members of his administration who he had foisted on Fubara.

But the Ijaw social cultural body group under the aegis Ijaw National Congress (INC) yesterday, called on President Bola Tinubu to call Wike to order over the political crisis in Rivers State.

Fubara, reacting to the recent happenings in the state, made the assertion while inaugurating 20,000 housing units for low income earners in the State, adjacent the OPM Headquarters, Mbodo-Aluu, along International Airport road, Ikwerre Local Government Area.

The governor explained that in protecting the interest of the State, his administration would continue to do what was right before God and men while encouraging a robust participation of the people in governance.

"For our people, I want to assure you, our government has nothing to do with fighting anybody. Our governance is to take care and defend our people. I can assure you here, that this is the beginning of our service to the people of Rivers State.

"It is not service to the elites, but to the poor and low income earners. Those are the people we want to stand with and we are standing with them from today," he said.

Fubara, noted that his administration has started a new history with the 20,000 units of housing by giving new hope to Rivers people particularly the poor.

He assured that in a few months, the first phase of the project would be completed and the housing units allocated to the low income earners through a transparent process.

"I want to also say it here, let it also be my own commitment that this facility, once it commences and gets to the stage of allotment, it will go to the rightful people and not one big man to allocate to his family. It will be transparent so that the targeted people will access and benefit from it."

Fubara, remarked that because his administration has started reaping from its open door policy, as opportunities like economic empowerment, access to housing and other benefits are in the offing for the people.

"First of all, we need to give our people hope and today, I believe that everybody in our dear State has seen that light. How did we come about this magic? We opened our doors for negotiation and opportunities, knowing that government cannot do it alone. We had to invite people that are ready to invest in our State.

"I make bold to say it; Rivers State is a safe haven for investment. What we are doing today is to let the world know it, and not what you hear in the media. I tell you that Rivers State is safe and secure for anybody anywhere to come and invest. Your investment is safe in our hands," he enthused.

In his remarks, the Acting Administrator of New City Development Authority, Mr. Aaron Obele, said the 20,000 units of housing would sit on a 1000 hectares of land.

Obele, stated that the first phase which started on a 100 hectares of land, would provide affordable houses in a striving and inclusive community for the people to live in.

On his part, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of TAF Africa Global, explained that the project was the largest housing initiative on a public-private partnership in Africa and the Rivers State government would not incur any financial cost in accomplishing the project.

He assured that his company would be diligent in speeding up work to deliver it in good time, while also creating economic opportunities for the people.

However, in the solidarity march which had hundreds of youth, Ijaw group and other stakeholders in the State, they chanted that Fubara was being intimidated and gagged for his alleged refusal to pander to the whims and caprices of his godfather, Wike. It commenced from the popular UTC junction and terminated at the Government House, Port Harcourt.

Speaking at the rally, Abiante (Andoni/Opobo/Nkoro federal Constituency) commended Fubara for taking steps to renovate the Rivers State House of Assembly complex and showing leadership amidst the political crisis in the State. Abiante, also assured the governor of the support of his constituents to provide development for the people of the State, saying, "There is always a price to be paid for liberty and that is standing strong, standing firm".

"The governor decided after a structural integrity test that the chambers failed to give the Rivers people befitting chambers for legislative function and why that is ongoing an alternative has been provided. They didn't ask them to sit under the shade or a mango tree.

"For the illegal members of the Rivers State House of Assembly, not for those who voluntarily resigned and relinquished their responsibilities but for those who are standing with the Rivers people, who know they got there on the mandate and the sweat and sacrifice of the Rivers people they have provided an alternative place to seat.

"No king reigns forever, this is the time for another king who has been lawfully elected" he advocated.

Abiante also justified the decision by the governor to demolish the House of Assembly building, saying, "there was a recent incident of explosion and it failed an integrity test, nobody will want to expose himself to that danger."

"Is there a history of having to rebuild public assets, the answer is yes. The Mile One market had been brought down and reconstructed, the fruit garden had been brought down and reconstructed. The Assembly quarters had been brought down and reconstructed. So what is the difference. The difference perhaps is the public asset. When they had challenges, they had to be rebuilt and in rebuilding they had to bring down the previous structures that were there.

"Some members have decided to leave the duty that were assigned to them. The constitution is very clear, the Supreme Court has made a decision in that, that if you leave your political party upon which you are elected when there is no division, you lose your seat.

"As it stands today, we have members who were former members of the House Assembly. On their volition they decided to leave. They should be man enough to stand up to what they have chosen, the choice they have made," he said during an interview on a national television.

On her part, Boma Goodhead, two-time lawmaker in House Representatives, a relation of the popular Ex-Niger Delta Agitator, Asari Dokubo, said nobody would be allowed to pocket Rivers people in the name of appointments procurement.

She said, "The federal government is his pocket, the judiciary is in his pocket, the presidency is in his pocket, the Chief of Staff is in his pocket, the security agencies are in his pocket. But let us tell him that Rivers State cannot be in his pocket.

"He said he procured every appointment with money, he can procure the appointment there with the money of Rivers State people, no problem, but let me also tell President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the people of Nigeria that this man, Nyesom Wike lies in advance. He is not consistent with anything.

"So please, we are tired of holding our hands. The next time any of these security operatives come into Rivers State to misbehave, any more problem from them, we answer them on our own way. We will defend ourselves and our resources.

"Mr. President, you have won at the Supreme Court, tell Nyesom Wike that we are not going to take this anymore. No more will it be said in Rivers State again that one individual can come up to control Rivers State anymore. We are Rivers and Rivers is for us".

AGAIN, TINUBU ASSURES FOREIGN INVESTORS OF EASY FUND REPATRIATION

the continent. We will continue to promote democracy and good governance. I will maintain an open-door policy, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Chief of Staff are also available.

"For the avoidance of doubt, we are already working on the issues of double taxation, and it will be properly streamlined to favour business growth. Nigeria is home and a haven for investors."

In his speech, the Rwandan High Commissioner said the government of Rwanda was prepared to enhance bi-lateral relations with Nigeria, with new visa policies and trade agreements.

Tinubu also asked the Ambassador of Hungary to explore all opportunities of building partnership, especially in the areas of agriculture and food security, and how to leverage the experience of the country in technology.

"Thank you so much for taking care of our students who are in your country. We are a very big country, with huge potential to sustainably spur economic growth. We are ready to improve relations, especially in the areas of agriculture and food security," the President said.

On his part, the Hungarian Ambassador commended the President for his bold, courageous and strategic decisions to reposition the Nigerian economy, listing some areas of collaboration to include education, agriculture, food security, security, and medical technology.

According to him: "My Prime Minister always says that our relations are based on mutual respect."

The President told the Ukrainian Ambassador that Nigeria would always work for global peace and harmony.

"We are with you in prayers. We will continue to support good governance and democracy," Tinubu stated.

COURT STRIKES OUT LAWSUIT ON OMLS 123, 124, 126, 137

the court delivered yesterday, the court held that the Originating Summons was incompetent, having failed to join a necessary party (Salvic Petroleum) to the suit. Consequently, the suit was struck out.

In effect, with the striking out of the suit, the order of injunction earlier made in the suit becomes extinguished.

It is useful to note that since all of Kaztec Engineering Ltd, Mars Exploration and Production Company Ltd, and Slavic Petroleum Resources Limited, did not pay the signature bonuses for the award within the timelines prescribed for it in their respective letters or award, the award had lapsed and the awardees no longer had any interest in the assets.

Accordingly, OMLs 123,134,126 and 137 has formally reverted to NNPC Limited and the national oil company has all the rights of concessionaire in the asset, subject to such requirements as the Commission may impose in accordance with extant laws.

The judgement, it was gathered, was a win for the Nigerian upstream sector and the Nigerian economy as a whole as it has freed a natural resource for utilisation without any legal encumbrances.

NEWS

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TOURING OGUN CARGO AIRPORT...

L-R: Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr. Wale Edun; Ogun State Governor, Prince Dapo Abiodun, and the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Senator George Akume, during a tour of the Gateway Agro Cargo International Airport, Thursday.

Northern Governors Donate N180m to Tudun Biri Bomb Victims

●*Tackling insecurity, crucial to devt of north, Says Yahaya*

● *Officers who misfired drone'll not go unpunished, Says Defence Chief*

Kingsley Nwezeh in Abuja, **John Shiklam** in Kaduna and **Segun Awofadeji** in Gombe

The Northern States Governors Forum (NSGF), has donated N180m to the victims of the bomb incident in Tudun Biri community, Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna state.

The donation was announced in a communique issued after the meeting of the governors yesterday at the Government House, Kaduna.

This is as the Chairman of NSGF and Governor of Gombe State, Muhammad Inuwa Yahaya, said that addressing insecurity and other challenges were crucial to the development of the North.

Also, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Gen. Christopher Musa, yesterday, said that officers, who misfired the drone that killed scores of civilians in Kaduna will not go unpunished.

He said those found guilty of the offence will face a court-martial, maintaining that the armed forces were not known to shield offenders even as he cited standing court martials and incidents of guilty offenders, who are already in jail.

The NSGF commiserated with the government and people of Kaduna State over the unfortunate incident which occurred on December 3, killing over 100 people while many others were injured.

The governors prayed for the repose of the souls of those who lost their lives and wished those in the hospital speedy recovery.

The communique was signed by the chairman of the forum and governor of the Gombe State, Muhammad Yahaya.

He commended the Kaduna State and the federal governments for the way and manner they handled the unfortunate incident so far.

According to the communique, "The forum resolved to work collectively to ensure that the tragic incidence is thoroughly investigated with a view to compensating victims and taking corrective measures to prevent future occurrence.

"The forum resolved to vigorously pursue the collective interest of the North in areas of enhanced security, peaceful coexistence, economic development, youth employment, drug abuse and revitalisation of education at all levels."

The governors also commended the federal government for the renewed vigour in the fight against insecurity, menace of kidnaping, banditry, communal clashes and terrorism, bedeviling the region.

The governors further resolved to "stand united in addressing challenges facing the north, through enhanced collaboration with security agencies, strengthening local law enforcement, community engagement, adoption of modern technology and administrative reforms, as well

FG Tightens Noose On Unregistered Mining Professionals

●*Alake, Badaru fine-tune plan to secure mining areas*

Folalumi Alaran in Abuja

In a bid to curb the menace of unregistered mining engineers, the federal government has said it would henceforth process proposals for solid minerals investment from members of the Council of Nigerian Mining Engineers and Geoscientists (COMEG), in recognition of their critical role in the sector.

In a landmark endorsement, the Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake,declared that all reports coming to the ministry must bear the COMEG stamp while also affirming that only COMEG certified professionals will be recognized by the federal government.

Alake announced the new measure to the inductees of the council at the ceremony held in Abuja yesterday.

This is as Alake and his Defence counterpart, Abubakar Badaru, are putting finishing touches to plans to secure mining areas in the country.

For the second time in less than three weeks, Badaru came calling at the minister's office on Thursday, where they headed straight into a closed door meeting.

Alake said the ministry will only attend to technical proposals for licensing and related procedures under the mining law with the seal of COMEG.

The minister lauded the institution and its Director General, Professor Opafunsho, for training qualified mining engineers and geoscientists, emphasising that the contribution of COMEG to the technical expertise of the mining sector cannot be overemphasised.

"Your role in the value chain cannot be underemphasised because you are professional engineers and geoscientists. These are critical elements needed in the reactivation efforts of the solid minerals sector. So, if we do not get it right from your level, Nigeria can't get it right at the tertiary level – exploration and exploitation or even get any substantial revenue from the sector. Distinguished graduands and inductees, I'm very happy for you. Congratulations!" Alake added.

The minister charged the inductees to avail themselves of constant knowledge to keep up with new innovations, stressing that having been highly trained, the criticalities of their training will be put to bear on the success of President Bola Tinubu's vision of enabling the mining sector to play a crucial role in contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria.

Speaking further, Alake admonished the inductees that COMEG relies on them to shore up its reputation whilst the ministry depends on their input to manifest the metrics of marketing the sector to global investors.

Musawa: Govt to Establish National Museum, Theatre in Abuja

Olawale Ajimotokan in Abuja

The federal government said it plans to establish a National Museum and a National Theatre in a creative city to be located in Abuja.

The Minister of Art, Culture and the Creative Economy, Hannatu Musa Musawa, disclosed this when she presented the 2024 Appropriation Budget draft to the Senate Committee on Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy at the National Assembly.

She stated that the establishment of the two edifices were top on the list of projects of the ministry which is intended to create employment, not only for creatives but also for Nigerians in general.

The attainment of this objective, she noted, will be subject to the approval of 2024 appropriation budget by the Senate.

Musawa further stressed that the ministry has been grossly underfunded and appealed to the Senate Committee to upscale its allocation in the 2024 budget.

"The ministry has been grossly underfunded and we will be unable to achieve anything of significance without the right funding. The potential of this ministry is astronomical if we tap into that so we would like to see what we can do at the legislative level to give the ministry the kind of funding and support that we require to achieve our vision within the roadmap, to be able to achieve the objectives of the Renewed Hope Agenda of Mr. President," Musawa said.

She asserted that in line with the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the ministry is aiming to contribute N100 billion to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030 and also to the establishment of major projects, which include the building of a National Theatre and National Museum in Abuja among other projects.

She explained that the Creative Economy is important to the ministry's core functions which include attracting foreign investment, cultural promotion and preservation, among others, in line with Section 21 of the 1999 Constitution.

NCE Rejects Request for Review of Public Servants' Retirement Age

Olawale Ajimotokan in Abuja

The National Council on Establishments (NCE) has rejected the call for upward review of retirement age for public servants from 60 to 65 and years of service from 35 to 40.

The Council reached the resolution at its 45th meeting held at the Command Guest House, Bauchi from December 11-13.

It resolved that the request by the organised labour was contrary to national aspiration of renewal, youth empowerment, innovation as well as not being in tandem with the reality of the country's population.

It would be recalled that the Nigeria Labour Union (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and their affiliate unions had called for a review of the service year from 35 to 40 years.

But the NCE in a communiqué signed at the end of its meeting by the Chairman and Head of Service of the Federation, Dr. Folasade Yemi- Esan and the Secretary, Olufemi Oloruntola, strongly advised all tiers of government to be on guard against the demand.

It, however, noted that the option of contract appointment is in existence and should be explored where necessary to bridge skills gaps as a result of retirement.

It also resolved that the Standing Committee should undertake a holistic evaluation of requests for enhanced entry points and report back at the 46th NCE Meeting for Osogbo, Osun State in 2024.

It also charged the secretariat to reiterate to all Ministries,Departments and Agencies (MDAs) the stringent criteria for enhanced entry point as approved by the 42nd NCE held in Lagos to stem frivolous requests.

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NEWS



COURTESY VISIT...L-R: Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun and Chairman/CEO, Lee Engineering Group, Chief Leemon Ikpea, during Chief Ikpea's courtesy visit to the IG on Wednesday

Soludo, Bello, Abaribe, Others Mourn Late Ex-governor of Anambra State, Ezeife

David-Chyddy Eleke in Awka, **Sunday Aborisade** in Abuja and **Ibrahim Oyewale** in Lokoja

Anambra State Governor, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, has expressed profound sadness over the demise of a former governor of the state, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife.

Soludo, who expressed sadness at the loss of the elder statesman in a statement by his Press Secretary, Mr. Christian Aburime, yesterday, described Ezeife as a man of many hats and a titan, saying that his departure would leave a void that would be difficult to fill.

The statement read in part, "It is with profound sadness and a deep sense of loss that Anambra State Governor, Prof. Chukwuma Charles Soludo,CFR, mourns the passing of a distinguished son of Anambra State, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, CON, who transitioned peacefully on Thursday, December 14, 2023, at the age of 85 years at the Federal Medical Centre, Abuja.

"A most illustrious son of the Ezeife Dynasty of Igbo-Ukwu area of Anambra State, Dr. Ezeife, a man of many hats, was a titan in the annals of our state and nation."

Ezeife's demise came barely three weeks after the burial of his co-former governor, Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuju, on November 23.

Ezeife was said to have died in Abuja on Thursday after battling an undisclosed illness.

A statement from the family signed by Chief Rob Ezeife read: "On behalf of the Ezeife Dynasty of Igbo-Ukwu, I wish to announce the promotion to glory of our most distinguished son, Okwadike, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, CON, a former Federal Permanent Secretary, the first Executive Governor of Anambra State, a former Political Adviser to the President and former Presidential Aspirant."

"This sad event took place yesterday at 6p.m. at the Federal Medical Centre, Abuja. More details about the deceased and the arrangements for his State Burial will be announced later."

Meanwhile, Kogi State Governor, Yahaya Bello, has commiserated with people and government of Anambra State over the death of former governor of the state and elder statesman, Ezeife, who died after brief illness.

This was contained in a statement signed by the Chief Press Secretary to the governor, Muhammed Onogwu.

"On behalf of the Government and People of Kogi State, Governor Bello joins in mourning the passing of Dr. Ezeife, calling it 'a monumental loss'. He describes Chief Ezeife, fondly known as 'Okwadike' as a respected leader, a statesman par excellence, a wise counsellor, and a bridge builder whose contributions to Nigeria's political landscape will remain deeply etched in the nation's history.

" Ezeife was a man of immense wisdom and integrity,' Governor Bello stated. 'His passion for Nigeria's unity and his dedication to good governance were exemplary. He served Anambra State and the nation with distinction and provided impactful leadership that will continue to inspire long after now.'

"Governor Bello recalled his own warm interaction with Ezeife in 2021, when the elder statesman commended his 'political trajectory' and described him as a 'young, vibrant, and enterprising politician' who 'dares the odds, pushes his conviction, and remains stoically with his aspirations.' This meeting, Governor Bello says, highlighted Chief Ezeife's commitment to mentoring young leaders and fostering understanding across regional and political divides.

"Ezeife's belief in the importance of collaboration and unity resonates deeply with me to this day,' Governor Bello says . 'He understood that Nigeria's progress hinges on our ability to bridge divides and work together for the common good. Like me, he was an advocate of equity, fairness and justice as the sole foundation for Nigerian unity. His legacy will continue to guide us as we strive to build a more just and equitable nation.'

"Governor Bello therefore extends his heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased, the Government and People of Anambra State, Ndigbo as a whole and the entire nation, while praying the Almighty God to grant Ezeife eternal repose and give comfort and strength to all during this difficult time," the statement stressed.

Also, former Minority Leader of the Senate, Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe, has expressed shock over the sudden death of a former governor of Anambra State, Ezeife.

In a statement by his Media Adviser, Uchenna Awom. Abaribe described Ezeife's death as the great fall of an Iroko tree in Igbo land and Nigeria.

He lamented that Okwadike's death has once more robbed Ndigbo nay Nigeria of a consummate advocate of people's right and equality for all.

Supreme Court Voids Quashing of Kanu's Felony Trial

Orders continuation of trial at Federal High Court

Alex Enumah in Abuja

The Supreme Court, yesterday, voided the judgement of the Court of Appeal which discharged and acquitted leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu, of alleged treasonable felony charges.

A five-member panel of the apex court in a judgement prepared by Justice Mohammed Garba, faulted the appellate court for holding that the mere fact that Kanu was brought back to Nigeria illegally to continue his trial on treasonable charge, robs the trial court of jurisdiction to continue trial.

Kanu was arrested on October 14, 2015 and was arraigned alongside four others on an 11-count charge bordering on terrorism, treasonable felony, managing an unlawful society, publication of defamatory matter, illegal possession of firearms and improper importation of goods, among others.

He pleaded not guilty to the charge and was in 2017, admitted to bail in the sum of N100 billion with three sureties in like sum. The court in addition held that one of the sureties must be a religious leader.

However, few months after he was admitted to bail on health grounds, Kanu had fled the country in September 2017, after the military invaded his family's home in Afara-Ukwu, near Umuahia, Abia State.

The situation led the federal government to apply for the revocation of his bail which was granted in 2019, by Justice Binta Nyako of the Federal High Court, Abuja. Besides, the court ordered for the arrest of the IPOB leader, wherever he may be found.

Based on the court's order, a combined security agents in collaboration with international police, arrested Kanu and forcefully brought him back to Nigeria, to continue his trial.

The federal government subsequently re-arraigned him on an amended 15-count charge, bordering on treasonable felony, amongst others.

But, Kanu through his team of lawyers led by Prof. Mike Ozekhome, SAN, urged the court to dismiss the fresh charge and free Kanu, claiming that the illegal process through which Kanu was brought into the country renders the charge incompetent and robbed the court of jurisdiction.

In her judgement, the court struck out eight out of the 15 count charge and ordered Kanu to stand trial on the remaining charge.

Dissatisfied, Kanu approached the appellate court to challenge the decision of Justice Nyako, which was granted and quashed the charge against Kanu, prompting the federal government to institute the instant appeal at the Supreme Court.

I Had Malaria, Didn't Collapse, Akpabio Tells Colleagues, Associates

Sunday Aborisade in Abuja

President of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio, yesterday, clarified that he was down with Malaria after his 61st Birthday Colloquium held in Abuja on Thursday which was attended by President Bola Tinubu.

Akpabio, who addressed his colleagues, associates, staff and journalists said he did not slump contrary to social media reports that he collapsed and was rushed to the hospital immediately the event was over.

He said, "What happened yesterday (Thursday), was a show of humanity. So I went home and I called my doctor and I was assured that I had a bout of Malaria mingled with stress and the went home.

"It could also be described in another way as exhaustion. In fact anybody could be exhausted. In fact, drink water daily so that you don't get exhausted. This is to say that the beat goes on."

Akpabio commended the traditional media for not celebrating the sensational report hyped by the online and social media platforms.

Earlier, his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Hon. Eseme Eyiboh, had said the social media report that his principal, collapsed on Thursday, was not true.

In his rebuttal, Eyiboh said that the rumours and reports were fictionalised extensions of the Senate President's assertion of being tired at the end of the programme.

Eyiboh said, "The rumours which have come to our notice through word of mouth from concerned and patriotic stakeholders have been fanned by some social media news channels with notoriety for the dissemination of phony newsflashes.

"It was especially disconcerting that the conjectures on the wellbeing of the Senate President came after he was celebrated by the crème-de-crème of the nation's leadership across all sectors at the Colloquium that was focused on defining a legislative agenda for national development.

"Senator Akpabio spoke on his feet for more than 30 minutes as he gave the expose` of his trajectory in a way as never before.

We Need Bold, Courageous Leaders to Make Nigeria Better, Says Anglican Primate

Kemi Olaitan in Ibadan

The Primate, Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Most Reverend Henry Ndukuba, yesterday, said for the country to get out of the woods it needs a leader that is bold and courageous to take the right steps and decisions.

This is just as he called for prayers for political leaders in the country as they cannot do it alone, stating that it is only God that can grant leaders that Nigeria deserves.

He spoke in Ibadan,the Oyo State capital, during the dedication of the new Bishopscourt, chapel, conference hall, chaplain and drivers which forms part of activities to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Diocese of Ibadan North (Anglican Communion).

The cleric who is also the Archbishop and Metropolitan, represented by the Archbishop of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province and Bishop of Osun North, Most Reverend Abiodun Olaoye, who expressed hope in the administration of President Bola Tinubu, said people must learn to look at God and not the government to bring about a change in their situation.

According to him, "We thank God for what is happening today in Ibadan North Diocese, it is a great event because we can see the wonders that God is performing in His Church. It's a miracle that within just 16months, five buildings were completed by Ibadan North Diocese.

"So, the Primate is very happy at this event because it is really a memorable event in the life of the Diocese as they celebrate the 25th Anniversary.

"As the country is, this is a proof that God provides for his own. When we put our trust in Him, when we rely on him, he supplies our needs. Most of the time, we look up to the government, but it is God that we should look up to. When we look up to God and cry out to him, just like the people of Ibadan North Diocese did, they cried to God, they prayed to him because what has happened today is as a result of answered prayers.

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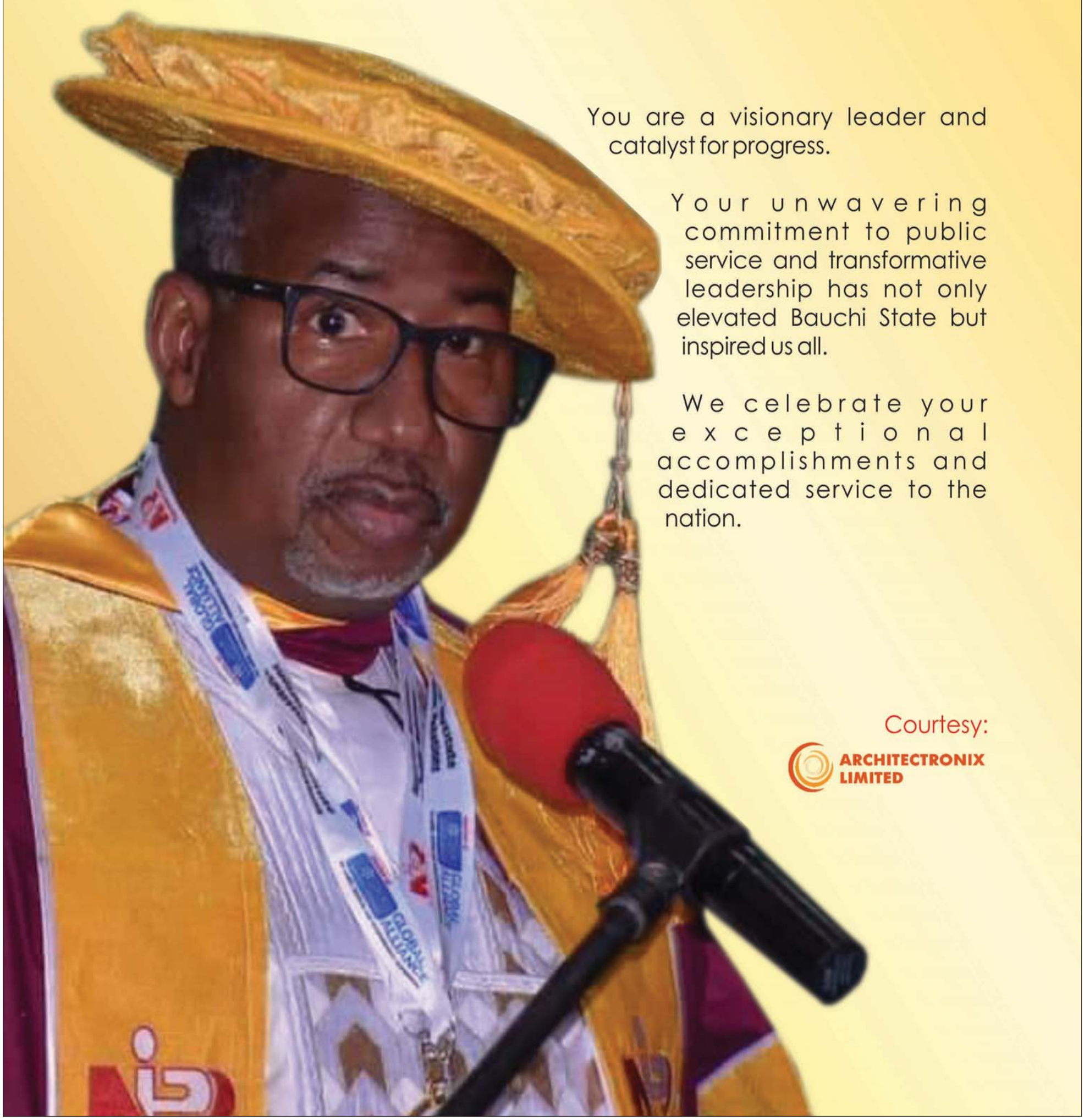
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INSIGHT



Who's in charge?

TO OUR READERS

Letters in response to specific publications in THISDAY should be brief (150-200 words) and straight to the point. Interested readers may send such letters along with their contact details to **saturdayeditor@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 (950-1000 words). They should be sent to **saturdayeditor@thisdaylive.com** along with the email address and phone numbers of the writer.

ODU President General's 100 Days in Office

Obosi is, now, at the cusp of rebirth owing to the developmental strides being recorded by the Obosi Development Union(ODU) President General, Chimezie Obi. In order to ensure that people who have vision, moral probity, and leadership qualities get into the saddle of power at the town level, the state governments do monitor towns' unions elections. And that was the case in Obosi, Anambra State, when the Obosi Development Union (ODU) General Election took place on August 19, 2023.

During the election, the delegates for the election voted overwhelmingly for Chimezie Obi, who contested for the post of the ODU President General. He won resoundingly, scoring 127 votes while his closest rival garnered a measly 27 votes. His victory was a measure of his popularity with the people. And it is a proof that the Obosi people believe that he has the competence to steer the ship of the town to the path of unity and progress.

Chimezie Obi took up the gauntlet of leadership challenge and hit the ground running. No sooner was he sworn in than he threw himself in the arduous task of contributing his quota for the fixing of Obosi town's multifarious problems. So far, he has shown uncommon zeal in his leadership of ODU.

He collaborated with Ifeanyi Okoma, the Anambra State Commissioner for works, to facilitate the commencement of repair work on the dilapidated thoroughfares in Obosi inland and urban town. The Ukwu-Udala-Eke-Ugamuma-Anwusi-Nkwo trunk roads, which are in varying states of disrepair, are being repaired, now. Obosi town is now a huge construction site.

In addition to the ongoing repair of bad roads and construction of new ones in Obosi, a borehole will be sunk at the College of Health Technology Obosi with an overhead tank provided for the school. And a pedestrian bridge would be built to connect St. Mary's Anglican Church, Obosi to Anwusi.

Again, Barrister Obi holds the belief that leadership is about political power devolving to people and organs of government. He feels that people should be appointed to offices based on their abilities and areas of specialities.
So in line with his political belief, he created these ODU Committees, viz ODU Media and Orientation Committee, ODU Sports Committee, and ODU Education Committee. And he rejigged the Obosi Central Security Outfit with Sir Dan Igbokwubili leading the charge.

So far, the committees he created are performing creditably to our delight and satisfaction. For example, the ODU Media and Orientation Committee has been providing counter-narratives to the stereotyping and labelling of Obosi as the haven of drug traffickers, armed robbers, kidnappers, and confidence artists. And the tik-tokers whose uncharitable portrayals of Obosi are based on utter falsehoods and hearsays are warned to cease tarnishing our town's image.

The ODU under the leadership of Chimezie Obi is poised to transform Obosi town, positively. His determination to change the negative narratives about Obosi is palpable. And if the people of Obosi will continue to lend him the needed support, he will surpass our expectations.

Chiedu Uche Okoye, Uruowulu-Obosi, Anambra State

Obama, Gates: Include Witch Persecution in Campaign

The Advocacy for Alleged Witches welcomes the collaboration between the foundations of Michelle Obama, Amal Clooney, and Melinda French Gates to end child marriage in Africa. These foundations have committed to ending this practice within a generation. This initiative, announced during their recent visit to Malawi and South Africa, demonstrates the urgency that such a harmful traditional and cultural practice demands. Child marriage is a sore on the conscience of humanity. It violates the health, rights, and well-being of women and girls. Culture, tradition, or religion should not be used to excuse or justify practices that undermine the humanity of women and girls. So it was a great relief to know that these influential women would be working together to combat this menace.

At the same time, AfAW wants to draw the attention of Obama, Clooney, and Gates to another practice that is undermining the rights of women in Africa: witch persecution. Witchcraft accusation is pervasive in Malawi and other parts of the region. Witchcraft accusation is a gendered phenomenon that predominantly targets women and girls. Those accused of witchcraft are tortured, banished, or murdered in cold blood. In Malawi and other parts of the region, accused women are raped, stoned to death, or lynched. Many accused women are banished and forced to live in make-shift shelters called witch camps in Ghana's Northern region. In Malawi and the Central African Republic, the accused are imprisoned, or flee to live in prisons to avoid being killed. Rooted in traditional and cultural beliefs, witch hunting is another vicious phenomenon which they said would not be eradicated.

This misperception should be rejected and discarded. This mistaken assumption has prevented international organizations including the UN from treating the problem of witch persecution with the urgency that it deserves. This misrepresentation has made the world ignore and look away while women and sometimes girls are accused, abused, abandoned, or savagely killed in the name of witchcraft. As in the case of child marriage, the Advocacy for Alleged Witches believes that witch persecution can end within a generation. The problem can be solved or resolved in a matter of years. AfAW is working and campaigning to rally national and international political will against witch hunting. That was why the organization announced in 2020 a decade of activism against witch persecution in Africa.

AfAW urges Obama, Clooney, and Gates to join efforts in stopping witch persecution of women and girls. They should know that the girls they are trying to save from being married away as children could end up being stoned to death or buried alive for witchcraft. Obama, Clooney, and Gates should include witch-hunting in their campaign because the practice is rooted in gender injustice and misogyny. The foundations should know that women are likely to suffer child marriages when they are young and witch persecution when they are growing old. So they should not focus on one and ignore the other. To effectively protect and defend the rights of women and girls, they should tackle both child marriage and witch-hunting. The foundations should commit to ending practices that violate the rights of women, whether they are young or old, children or adults.

Leo Igwe directs the Advocacy for Alleged Witches, which campaigns to end witch persecution in Africa by 2030

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NEWS



2023 ANNUAL DIRECTORS' DINNER...

L-R: Past President, Chartered Institute of Directors Nigeria (CIoD Nigeria), Mr. Thomas Awagu; Second Vice President, CIoD Nigeria, Mrs. Amina Oyagbola; President, CIoD Nigeria, Alh. Tijjani Borodo; immediate past President, CIoD Nigeria, Dr. Ije Jidenma; past President, CIoD Nigeria, Alh. Ahmed Rufai Muhammed; and Director General, CIoD Nigeria, Mr. Bamidele Alimi, at the 2023 annual Directors dinner in Lagos...recently

PHOTO: ETOP UKUTT

Wike Urges NASS to Approve N17.1bn FCTA 2024 Appropriation Bill

Olawale Ajimotokan

Federal Capital Territory Minister, Nyesom Wike, yesterday asked the National Assembly to approve N17,109,746,531.00 appropriated for FCT Administration in the N27.5 trillion 2024 proposed National Appropriation Bill.

He made the plea when he appeared before the Joint Session of the Senate and House Committees on FCT.

He explained that N17.1 billion was allocated to the FCT Administration as its National Priority Capital Budget Ceiling for the 2024 fiscal year.

He said the FCT carefully prioritised projects identified for implementation to achieve quick and robust impact, adding the budget if passed would help complete critical projects in the nation's capital and the satellite towns.

The budget presented by Wike proposed N5 billion as a counterpart fund for the Greater Abuja Water Supply projects, N4.5 billion for the design and construction of Abuja Cultural Centre and Millennium Tower, and N3 billion for the rehabilitation of the Federal Secretariat while N4 billion was allocated for the completion of the Vice President's Residence.

He also added that N609.7 million would go into the settlement of residential and office accommodation for international organisations in FCT.

Evaluating the performance of the 2023 budget, Wike said that out of the N15.5 billion that was appropriated for infrastructural development, only N8 billion was released representing 52 per cent.

Responding, the Chairman, Senate Committee on FCT, Senator Ibrahim Bomai, acknowledged that all the projects were ongoing ones, adding that the funds would not be enough to complete the projects.

He pointed out that the FCT operates a dual budget – the national budget and the statutory budget and expressed hope that the statutory budget might be in the hundreds of billions.

He, therefore, appealed to the members of the joint session to give no objection considering the meager amount.

Edo Group Supports Otono Ahead of Governorship Campaign

An umbrella group for good governance and progressive change in Edo State has presented branded T-Shirts to Barrister Kasimu Otono ahead of the upcoming Edo State governorship election.

Otono who is contesting the Edo State governorship election under the All Progressives Congress (APC) was received by the group in Lagos on Tuesday, December 12, 2023.

Hassan Abiri, representing the Edo Concerned Progressives, said at the event that the time has come for a progressive leader like Otono to take over the reins of leadership in Edo State.

According to Abiri, the group with a membership base of over 1,500 is self-sponsored and committed to work assiduously for the realisation of Barrister Kasimu Otono as the governorship candidate of APC and subsequently the elected governor of Edo State in 2024.

He further explained that the group is spread across the three Senatorial Districts in Edo State with a Coordinator in each of the Districts,noting that Otono's humility and his excellent character and capacity are some of the things that have endeared him to the group.

Otono while thanking the group, said he would never let the people of Edo State down with the brand of leadership he is bringing to the state.

He also used the opportunity to congratulate the group for being the first major Support Group to officially register to work with the campaign organisation for the realisation of 'Barrister Kasimu Otono (BKO)' project.

Otono is a legal practitioner, philanthropist and real estate entrepreneur who hails from Idegun-Anwain in Ward 8 of Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. Born on the 10th day of January 1979. Kasimu grew up in Auchi where he kicked off his academic journey in life.

He is the son of Late Alhaji Chief Sadiku Otono from Idegun-Anwain and Mrs. Felicia Otono of the Okpere family in Uromi (Esan North-East Local Government Area) of Edo State. The father, Chief Sadiku was a hard working farmer, a versatile oil marketer and electronic dealer who was best known as Radio Doctor because of his proficiency in the repairs of radio sets amongst other electronic gadgets. Chief Sadiku was so versatile in the world of business that popular music artistes from all over Edo State needed him in order to get their art out into the market during the early 80s to the late 90s before venturing into Oil Marketing in 1989 where he was the dealer of Texaco in Auchi and later owned his independent oil marketing firm called FUTONO OIL in 1998.

He grew up under the strong tutelage of his father who would always take him and his siblings to the farm despite his status as a well to do man.

Through this regular exercise even up to the university level, Otono had become accustomed to hard work and philanthropy because of the work put into cultivating crops and his father's attitude of giving to the poor unconditionally.

Mother of One-year-old Seeks N1m for Multiple Holes Heart Surgery

Ayodeji Ake

The distraught mother of one-year-old Mofeoluwa Ochoche-Samuel is desperately seeking N1 million for open-heart surgery for multiple holes in the heart.

Baby Mofeoluwa was diagnosed with this heart defect including a large-sized heart at six months old.

The medical report from the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) shows she has symptomatic congenital heart disease.

The child's mother, Folakemi Ogunsusi, narrated her ordeal to THISDAY.

"I had her on 17th April 2022.

"Since her birth, she has been breathing fast, constantly sleeping and not eating well. She doesn't cry out loud. It was last September when she started running a fever."

Twenty-five-year-old Folakemi, a single mum, took her baby to Rando Hospital in Lagos, where the doctor discovered Mofeoluwa wasn't breathing well.

Folakemi emphasised: "The doctor admitted her immediately that day, and placed her on oxygen for a month. The hospital advised us to do an x-ray.

"Upon getting the result, they discovered she has a large heart. Immediately, the doctor placed her on heart medications. After a month, the hospital referred us to a cardiologist at LUTH."

After a series of examinations and tests, baby Lois was placed on oxygen at LUTH, where she spent a week and a half.

She lamented: "I'm a teacher. I earn N25,000 monthly. I won't be able to meet up savings even if I save my entire salary for three years. I don't want to lose my child."

Mofeoluwa is only a year and five months old now. She isn't growing: she isn't crawling or walking.

Through a non-profit organisation, Gifting Volunteer Network, the mother has called on the public to save her daughter.

Otti Vows to Sustain ABSUTH as Institution Regains Full Accreditation from Medical Council

Emmanuel Ugwu-Nwogo in Umuahia

After nearly two years in limbo the Abia State University Teaching Hospital(ABSUTH) has regained full accreditation following a clean bill of health issued by the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria(MDCN).

The state-owned Teaching Hospital lost its accreditation in May 2022 following persistent industrial unrest and inactivity caused by unpaid salaries of over 24 months.

But on assumption of office Otti made the resuscitation of ABSUTH a top priority and resolved the unpaid salary problem and procured needed equipment for the health institution to regain its status.

The state Commissioner for Health, Dr. Ngozi Okoronkwo, was said to have broken the news about the positive outcome of the visit by the MDCN accreditation team led by the Deputy Registrar, Dr. Nnaemeka Nwakanma.

"We just concluded our meeting with the team. To the glory of God, we have full accreditation to graduate medical students for the next five years," Dr. Okoronkwo was quoted to have announced to the governor late Thursday night.

Apart from getting permission to restart training medical doctors, the health commissioner said that the admission quota of ABSUTH has been increased from 120 to 150 per session.

NACAT Partners Catholic Care Home, Donates Money, Food Items

Kingsley Nwezeh in Abuja

The Network Against Corruption and Human Trafficking (NACAT) said it adopted the Poorest of the Poor Rehabilitation Centre, commonly known as Anawim Home, as its annual beneficiary of its humanitarian gesture.

Anawim Home, operated by a voluntary, non-political, and non-profit-making church body, the Missionary Sisters of the Poorest of the Poor (MSPP) —dedicates itself to addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, irrespective of class, race, tribe, color, or religion.

The development took place on a Wednesday during NACAT's charitable visit to Anawim Home, situated in Bako, Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja.

Led by its Executive Director, Samson Tega, alongside Barrister Ovie Justice, Director of Legal and Operations, and Stanley Ugabge, Operational Manager, NACAT demonstrated its commitment as a pro-democracy civil society organisation by giving back to the society through the orphanage home.

In a tangible manifestation of this commitment, the organisation generously donated food items such as rice, noodles, sanitary wear, cash and more to Anawim Home.

During her welcome address, Sister Augustina Malogun, the General Coordinator of MSPP, provided the NACAT team with insights into the activities of the rehabilitation centre.

Highlighting the operations of the centre in its 27 years existence, she disclosed that the center served as a haven for less privileged individuals, encompassing orphans, those grappling with mental health challenges, abandoned infants and children, as well as young girls facing unwanted pregnancies and engaged in prostitution.



HONOURED FOR EXCELLENCE...

L-R: Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of Sun Newspaper Mr. Onuoha Ukeh and Founder of Zeetin Engineering and Expedition Into Deep Forests, Azibaola Ribert, receiving his Letter of Nomination for The Sun Public Service Award 2023...in Abuja...recently

ASR Africa, USAID Deliver 10 DOTS Centres to Curb Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS

Dike Onwuamaeze

The Abdul Samad Rabiu Africa Initiative (ASR Africa), in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has completed the renovation of 10 Tuberculosis Directly Observed Treatment Short-Course (DOTS) centres in identified Primary Health Care centers in seven states in Nigeria.

The ASR Africa, which is a leading philanthropic organisation committed to delivering sustainable impact in health, education, and social development across the continent of Africa, renovated these centres under its HIV/TB Intervention Support programme.

It said that with a donation of $500,000 drawn from the ASR Africa's Fund for Social Development and Renewal, the partnership objectives included curbing tuberculosis (TB) and HIV in Nigeria and addressing Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) through supporting survivors with the provision of dignity kits in USAID-supported Sexual Assault Response Centres (SARCs).

Speaking on behalf of the Chairman of ASR Africa, Mr. Abdul Samad Rabiu, at the handover ceremony in Akinyele Primary Health Centre, Alimosho, Lagos, the Managing Director/CEO of ASR Africa, Dr. Ubon Udoh, applauded the USAID team for their intervention and their partnership with the government of Nigeria in the eradication of tuberculosis in the country.

Udoh commended the governments of Kano, Rivers, Katsina, Bauchi, Anambra, Oyo, and Lagos States, and the respective agencies who worked to deliver on the project's success.

He noted that with the installation of the TB machines, over 22,108 samples have already been taken in all the centres combined, out of which confirmed positive cases are receiving expert medical treatment.

Udoh reiterated the commitment of the chairman of ASR Africa in investing resources towards tackling pressing developmental issues in health, education, and social development in Africa.

On her part, the Mission Director, USAID Nigeria, Ms. Anne Patterson, who was represented by the Deputy Director, HIV/TB Office, USAID Nigeria, Ms. Omosalewa Oyelaran, thanked the Executive Chairman of BUA Group and Founder of ASR Africa, Mr. Abdul Samad Rabiu, for collaborating with the USAID and invigorating the fight against Tuberculosis and HIV in Nigeria.

Patterson added that the partnership with ASR Africa Initiative has provided critical support to reducing the burden of the disease and ensure a better quality of life for those affected.

FG Commends Gov Abiodun on Agro Cargo Airport

James Sowole in Abeokuta

The Minister of Finance and the Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Mr. Wale Edun, has said that the Ogun State Agro-Cargo Airport, when completed, would add value to the lives of the people and contribute to the rapid growth of the state's and the nation's economy.

The minister stated this while fielding questions from journaists after being conducted round the airport by Governor Dapo Abiodun.

The minister described the airport as a major economic project of the Abiodun-led administration, which, when fully operational, will be a game-changer for the state.

He said: "I have had the opportunity to be here before and I know that the ARISE Agro-Cargo Industrial and Export Processing Zone, is a major economic achievement that speaks to the possibility of rapid growth of the economy, which is the objective of Mr. President to have more investments like this.

"It is a foreign, domestic, including investment by the government. It is the type of investment that grows the economy, that creates jobs, that reduces poverty and it is good for the people of Ogun State in particular as well as Nigeria in general that new economic life is being breathed into the area.

"As for this particular facility, this airport which is reputed to have the longest runway in Nigeria, I can see the terminal building receiving finishing touches to make it a full blown international passengers and cargo airport."

Edun, who described the project as "very impressive" with high standards, said the governor has leveraged on his experience in the corporate world, coupled with zeal, efficiency and attention to details, to execute major projects in the state, saying the airport is a testimony.

Speaking further, the minister said: "I congratulate the governor and the people of Ogun State on what has been achieved so far but more importantly, we look forward to the end result which is the creation of jobs, increased production, increased opportunities for farmers to produce and sell their products at good price and in good time without any of the usual post harvest lost and lose on transit that one get from agricultural products.

Ihonvbere Endorses Inaugural Otuo Heritage Celebrations

Durojaiye Ikhazuagbe

The Majority Leader of the Federal House of Representatives, Prof. Julius Ihonvbere, has endorsed the Otuo Heritage Celebrations scheduled for between December 26th and 30th, 2023 in Otuo, Edo State.

Ihonvbere who is two-time member representing the Owan Federal constituency of Edo State in the House of Representatives, said in his goodwill message to the community that he admires Otuo people for having historically demonstrated unique qualities of dependability, credibility, resilience and hard-work.

"The up coming Otuo Heritage Celebration is first of its kind. Historically, the Otuo people have demonstrated their unique qualities of dependability, credibility, resilience, hard-work and the ability to mobilise their people at home and in the diaspora to support projects and worthy causes. Otuo people have always identify with not just Owan East and West but the entire Afenmai and Edo North.

The APC Majority Leader stressed further that it is not by accident that Otuo has produced some of the most credible, hardworking and achieving individuals in the country, both in the legislative and executive arms of government as well as in the military.

"I am therefore very happy that Otuo People are coming together to celebrate themselves and use this opportunity to encourage their young ones to learn the language, the dances, cultures and values of the Otuo People. It is also an opportunity to bring to the fore the original, distinctive and delicious cuisine of the people and educate the young ones on traditions, leadership and community priorities and also identify projects that need to be completed for a better life."

DAME Awards: Oborevwori Congratulates Obaigbena

Delta State Governor, Sheriff Oborevwori, has congratulated media mogul and Founder of THISDAY/Arise Media Group, Prince Nduka Obaigbena, on his well deserved Lifetime Achievement Award at the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence (DAME) held in Lagos.

In a statement by his Chief Press Secretary (CPS), Sir Festus Ahon, in Asaba, Governor Oborevwori said the award was a befitting recognition for Obaigbena's exemplary contributions to the growth of journalism, media ownership and practice in Nigeria.

He remarked that Obaigbena has made significant contributions to the noble profession with well-deserved innovations, adding that his leadership and inspirational work earned him the nickname "The Duke" of journalism.

"On behalf of the Government and people of Delta, I congratulate our illustrious son and leader, Prince Nduka Obaigbena, on his investiture with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence.

"As a media virtuoso, a flawless journalist and one of Delta's pride, Obaigbena's contributions to the expansion and advancement of Nigeria's media sector will always be remembered in the annals of Nigerian history," Oborevwori said.

In a related development, Governor Oborevwori also congratulated The Nation Newspaper and its Editor, Mr Adeniyi Adesina, for winning the Newspaper of the Year and Editor of the Year awards, respectively at the 32nd edition of the Diamond Award for Media Excellence.

Oborevwori lauded The Nation media outfit for its sustainable growth strategy since it was founded on July 31st, 2006.

He noted that, in just 17 years of its existence, The Nation Newspaper had continued to blaze the trail as one of the leading newspapers in the country and urged the management and staff to sustain the winning tempo.

Abuja Businessman Sentenced to Life Imprisonment for Raping Two Minors

Michael Olugbode in Abuja

The FCT High Court sitting in Maitama, presided over by Justice Samira Bature, has sentenced an Abuja–based businessman, Chika Adionye, 42 years old to life imprisonment for rape of two minors.

The two minors who were aged seven and eight at the time of their rape, are cousins.

A statement yesterday by the Press Officer of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Vincent Adekoye, said the convict was arrested by the operatives of the agency in 2016 at Kara Majiji Community of Airport Road, a suburb of the FCT, following a petition by the mother of one of the victims.

The convict was accused of luring both children into his apartment shortly after his wife left home and violently raped them, one after the other.

He was charged to court for rape and offensive conduct contrary to Section 1 and 5 of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) 2015.

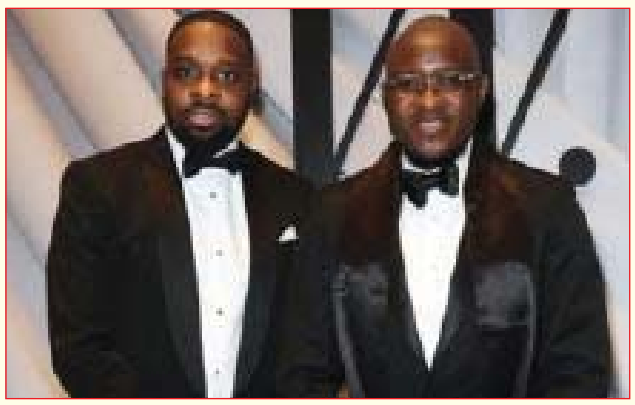
CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known and addressed as **HYCIENTH NKECHINYERE**, now wish to be known and addressed as **GOODNESS SOKARI**. All former documents remain valid. The general public should please take note.

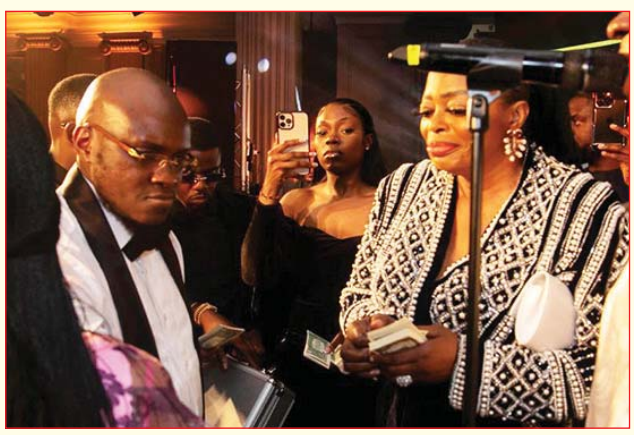
FAIRGROUND



with
AZUKA OGUJIUBA
azuka.ogujiuba@thisdaylive.com



Pastor Samuel Akokhia and Pastor Tobi Adegboyega



Pastor Tobi Adegboyega and Princess Aderonke Adejonwo



Daniel Ogoloma



Nkechi Blessing, Daddy Freeze and Pastor Tobi



Pastor Tobi, Wasiu Ayinde Marshall (KWAM 1) and Eniola Badmus



L-R: Oba Saheed Elegushi; Chief Adebola 'Akinsuku' Dosunmu of Lagos, Pastor Tobi and Abisola Anike with Wasiu Ayinde Marshall (KWAM 1) on stage

Night of Glitz, Glamour as Tobi Adegboyega Celebrates Birthday

Pastor Tobi Adegboyega marked his 43rd Birthday this year with a spectacular weekend of celebrations in London. The "11:11 Weekender" was a display of nothing short of the strength of the family and its leadership.

Kicking off with The W 'Super Car Rally' in London's most prestigious location, Park Lane, people gathered in their hundreds to witness the world's most iconic supercars on Sunday morning.

Tobi, alongside the leaders, took to the start line before a thrilling ride through famous London streets and landmarks from Mayfair through to Knightsbridge, Kensington, Belgravia, and Piccadilly.

Along the route, dozens of spectators eagerly awaited the arrival of the convoy which included Ferrari and Lamborghini supercars.

At the finish line in Pall Mall, hundreds of spectators queued to see the cars and to take pictures with Tobi. Also present on the day was a formidable force of The Nation Family and its leadership standing as a greater display of excellence.

The day continued to an evening of inspiration and celebration marked by the New Faces Awards. This was sponsored by The W Online Magazine at the renowned JW Marriott Grosvenor House, on Park Lane, London.

The New Faces Awards was established to honour trailblazers and visionaries who have made an impact in their various fields. The night hosted about 500 guests including CEOs, philanthropists, innovators, creatives and more.

It was a star-studded line up at the red carpet with paparazzi including Getty images and a champagne reception right until the doors of the dazzling ballroom opened.

The evening commenced with Music Nxtion giving a world-class performance that had guests on their feet throughout the night accompanied by the evening's winners gracing the stage to receive their awards across fifteen categories.

After the grandeur of the New Faces Awards ceremony, the celebration for Tobi reached its zenith with an exclusive after-party hosted in one of London's most opulent hotels. The Family, adorned in its usual sophisticated attire, immersed themselves in an evening of unrestrained joy.

The venue pulsed with an eclectic mix of music, featuring a DJ and live performances such as the highly anticipated Nigerian band, Solek opening the ceremony and Kwam1 who also gave an outstanding performance. A vibrant tapestry of cultures filled the room as young people from diverse backgrounds came together to revel in the festivities of the evening.

Guests came from around the world to celebrate Tobi, including distinguished personalities from Nigeria such as King Saheed Elugushi; Akinsuku of Lagos; Daddy Freeze, and his wife Tastebudz; Olori Ronke Ademiluyi-Ogunwusi, and Princess Aderonke Adejonwo. Also in attendance were celebrities such as Eniola Badmus, Real Housewives of Lagos' Tiannah, Actress Nkechi Blessing Sunday, Ubi Franklin, Smade and Bad Guy Toba.

One of the highlights of the night was the uproarious moments fueled by a bottomless drinks bar serving to keep spirits high throughout the celebration.

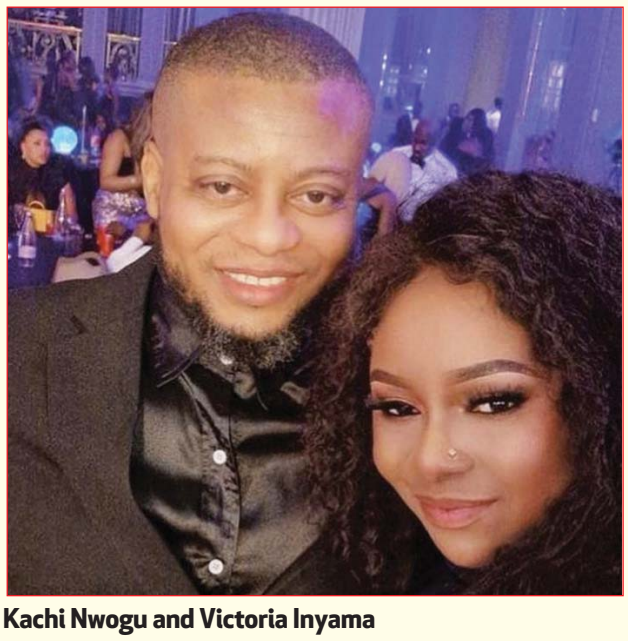
The atmosphere was further enriched by cultural traditions, including the lively tossing of money, creating unforgettable scenes echoing the unity within The Fxmily.

The after-party not only encapsulated the jubilant spirit of the 11:11 Weekender but also provided Tobi with a memorable occasion to enjoy alongside The Fxmily.

It was an exuberant conclusion to a weekend filled with remarkable events, solidifying the significance of the celebration in honour of Tobi.



Amber Diamond



Kachi Nwogu and Victoria Inyama

PEOPLE

James Ume: Touching Lives, One at a Time

In this report, **Sunday Ehigiator** chronicles the life and inspiration of philanthropist, and Founder of Unubiko Foundation, Chief Chijioke James Ume, and how he has been touching the lives of Nigerians, far and near

Just as the holy bible said in Acts Chapter 20, verse 35, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive', Chief Chijioke James Ume, has been an epitome of silent giving as many lives have been positively affected by his acts of charity.



Ume

Early life and career

Ume is a testament of grace, diligence and seizing opportunity as it comes which saw his meteoric transition from core editorial department to management in the print media and now media and management consultancy.

Born to Abam parents in Abia State, Ume was educated at the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, where he earned a BSc in Accountancy. He also holds a BSc, in Business Management, from the United Kingdom and an MSc in Communication Management from a United States university.

He cut his teeth in journalism in 2006, when he was employed as a Trainee Reporter by the late Sam Nda-Isaiah, publisher of the Leadership Newspapers, Abuja, where he rose to become the Regional Editor, South-South/South East, and Regional Manager of the same bureau, News Editor, Leadership Newspapers, Abuja, Features Editor, and Politics Editor. He was later moved to become, first, General Manager, Business Development and later General Manager of Leadership Newspapers.

Ume left the Leadership Group to float Channels Koos Media Consults Ltd in 2013, and went on to begin one of Nigeria's fastest-growing online newspapers, www.thewhistler.ng with over 40 staff.

That same year, the organisation hosted a training programme for media officers of federal government agencies in New York, Dallas, USA and Canada (April 2013 – November 2013).

As his way of giving back to society and being aware of the teething pain of lack, this budding media consultant set up the Unubiko Foundation to reach out and give hope to the needy. In this, he has made giving culture and this he has demonstrated without boundaries.

Happily married to Ngozi, a pharmacist and blessed with three children, Ume has become a pillar of support to the less privileged.

Ume's humanitarian feats

As a true "village boy," Ume's humanitarian feat is legendary as all the 27 Abam villages bear the imprimatur of his benevolence and charity. Months back, he handed over a Customary Court he rebuilt at the cost of over N150million.

Ume may have imbibed his charitable act from a very young age through his parents who were also known givers in the community. Ume has over time, continued to demonstrate in action, what humanity should represent, as he continues to give succour to the downtrodden,

From building schools and government facilities, to providing water infrastructure, paying millions of hospital bills, investing in the young by giving out scholarships, empowering the youth with entrepreneurial skills and donating millions of naira to the government for the benefit of the people, among others, Ume, also known as Ike Abam (A chieftaincy title bestowed on him by his community), has attracted and won several awards and recognitions.

The latest being, the Gani Fawehinmi Impact and Integrity Awards (GFIIA) recently bestowed upon him by the Human and Environmental Development Agenda (HEDA) Resource Centre, and the 'God's Mission Ambassadors Award' by the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN), Ketu Parish, for his act of philanthropism, and service to humanity over the years.

Rudderless and impervious to standard democratic values as Nigeria has become, it takes such interventions from Ume to keep the country from going over the edge.

Evidence from all parts of the country point to the reality that there is no nationalistic messiah on the horizon and that only the little gestures from those still flowing with the milk of human kindness would continue to give hope to the people.

This was essentially what attracted him to the community service projects that have been undertaken by Ume, a young man from Abia State, who is demonstrating a rare but much-needed attachment to developing his community and the people.

Pandemic era

In the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, long before politicians changed the meaning of 'palliative' to political tokenism, Ume had moved into his community, Abam, with 500 bags of Rice, hand sanitisers, hand-wash buckets and sundry other relief items to be distributed to the poor and vulnerable.

Pre-pandemic Initiatives

Ume did not just drop from the blues to dispense a one-off palliative for his people. Revelation from his digital footprints, which dates back to long before the Covid-19 pandemic shuttered the world, revealed that Ume single-handedly undertook the rehabilitation of a major access road to his community.

The Ndi Oji -Atan Abam road has been in very bad shape for many years and as the government paid little attention, the largely agrarian community lived behind the world. Erosion and other conspiratorial elements made the six-kilometre stretch of road unmotorable until his intervention.

For an individual, volunteering N13 million for relief works on a community road project must demand a sacrificial spirit but the overwhelming infrastructure needs of the people piling up for years continued to nudge the conscience of the willing benefactor, who was thus compelled to undertake the drilling of boreholes that provided portable water for more than six settlements in his locality.

Also those that drank from the fountain of Ume's kindness are young people in his community. On August 17, 2020, 20 youth from his state were sponsored to digital and leadership training, which embeds exposure to computer coding skills, digital marketing and leadership.

When asked why he was undertaking the funding of such an enterprise, Ume spoke of the importance of harvesting the energy in young people and channelling the same for values that would help better their lives and enrich society.

According to him, "It's imperative that our young people in Abia get the opportunity to immerse themselves with relevant leadership and digital skills that are critical for them to effectively compete and survive in today's hi-tech economy.

"We aim to re-channel the energy that some of our youths invest in unproductive ventures to something useful by starting to build enduring products and solutions that will power Africa through tech innovation."

Late last year, Ume handed over the Presbyterian Church he rebuilt, a women's development centre, and Ovukwu-Abam Secondary School, Atan-Abam, which he rebuilt, valued at N500 million to the owners.

Ume has empowered hundreds of widows, awarded no fewer than 200 scholarships for students in Arochukwu Local Government Area, paid WAEC fees for all students in Atan-Abam in 2020, and donated 100 brand new laptops to trainees in the digital economy.

He has also provided transformers to aid rural electrification and financed 44 boreholes for the 27 villages that make up Abam, among other philanthropic projects.

Payment of hospital bills

In October 2023, Ume's Unubiko Foundation, defrayed the bills of many indigent persons, who could not pick up their hospital bills at the Federal Medical Centre, (FMC), Umuahia, Abia State after being discharged.

Ume, said the donations were made to help the needy and indigent go back to their homes, reunite with their families and resume their normal lives.

The Foundation also paid the bills of people from Arochukwu/Ohafia Federal Constituency who were on admission at the hospital.

One of the beneficiaries, Mrs. Njasi Agwu, from Ohafia, disclosed that even though they had discharged weeks ago, she was detained because she wasn't able to raise the balance of N601,000 till it was cleared by the foundation.

Another beneficiary, Jombo Goodness, who was at Ludlow ward expressed joy to God Almighty for bringing an Angel in human form to pay her hospital bill. According to her, she was discharged on June 9, 2023, but was unable to raise the N309,000 balance, till the foundation came to her aid. She described Ike Abam as a Messiah sent by God to help people like her.

Similarly, Mrs. Enyinnaya Akudo, who benefited from the philanthropic gesture of the Foundation, was overwhelmed with happiness when the news of the payment of the hospital bill of N411,000 got to her. The patients didn't hold back in praying for the foundation and its founder who has continued to give hope to the needy.

Recognitions

As a result of his immense contributions to Abia State and community development efforts, Ume was singled out for commendation by former Governor of the State, Okezie Ikpeazu, in a personally signed letter. This was followed by his installation as "Ike Abam" by the 27 autonomous communities in early 2021.

He was also named the 'The Sun Humanitarian Service Icon Award winner for the year 2022, and was awarded Defender of Press Freedom, by the Federal Capital Territory chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in 2021.

Similarly, in May 2023, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) honoured Ume with the prestigious honour of 'Ray of Hope for Abia Youths'.

More charity

For Ume, charity may begin at home, but its impact is felt beyond home.

Speaking with THISDAY during the presentation of his last award from HEDA, Ume, said, the awards and recognitions he has gotten are a call for more service, as the reward for giving is more giving.

"It therefore also means that we just have to keep working harder. For me, serving the people is what gives me ultimate satisfaction, and that's what I believe in."

On what to expect from the foundation, moving forward, he said, "We are very grateful for the recognition that is coming. And I can tell you, we didn't know how all these awards came about, just some random guy reached out to me to inform me about the awards.

"For us, it's just a beautiful thing. And for the Unubiko Foundation, we are not stopping here. We have had many people support us in many ways, with the work we are doing.

"This December, we are handing over a brand new secondary school that we built to the community and the government on December 26, and we will also be handing over N300 million for scholarships to Abia State students.

"So we are not stopping, we will keep uplifting humanity and keep hoping that we will get support from our friends and associates who help us in the works that we are doing."

Ume and his Unubiko Foundation should be emulated so as to build a better, stable society, eradicate poverty, spread hope and happiness.

Ferdinand Ekechukwu - 08035011394
Email: ferdi_adthisday@yahoo.com

SHOWBIZFLAIR



R-L: Co-founder of Inkblot Productions and director of 'No Way Through', Chinaza Onuzo; Ikechukwu Onunaku; Chidi Mokeme, and some guests at the premiere

Inkblot Hosts Exclusive Screening for 'No Way Through'

Ferdinand Ekechukwu

It's a big year for Nollywood with the debut of several blockbusters. But there's apparently still more to come before the year ends. With the recent release of 'No Way Through', on the 7th of December, one of Africa's leading production houses, Inkblot Productions, played host to cast, crew, and friends in Lagos at an exclusive screening of their latest "blockbuster".

The event was graced by cast members including Chidi Mokeme, Seun Ajayi, Roberta Orioma, Deza The Great, Ikechukwu Onunaku, Co-founders of Inkblot Productions Zulumoke Oyibo, Damola Ademola and Naz Onuzo who is also the director of the movie and several other notable personalities.

Although award-winning actors Funke Akindele and Chioma Chukwuka couldn't make the private screening, their impeccable acting spoke loudly for them. Big Brother Naija Season 7 star, Sheggz Olusemo also made his feature film debut in the movie.

As the lights dimmed and the screening began, the director's vision and storytelling prowess were evident, taking the audience on a gripping journey as gasps, laughter, and moments of silence echoed in the theatre, underlining the emotional rollercoaster experienced by the attendees.

The film's ability to connect with the audience left them discussing their favourite scenes and speculating about the subsequent plot twists. Since its release on Amazon Prime Video on Friday, 8th December, the buzz around the movie has been a mixture of applause and excitement, with fans taking to social media to share their thoughts and awe about the crime thriller.

"I watched this movie last night, and my eyes were glued to the TV (I rate it 1000000000/10)." X (Twitter) user @sasheisha wrote. Another @ebukajer wrote: "Chiomaaaaa, we need part two; wanna see what her next move will be." Also, @domstoresjewelry wrote "Watched it yesterday, and it certainly was great. Loved their casting."

With superb acting from the star-studded cast, an engaging storyline, and expert filmmaking, "No Way Through" is poised to make waves in the Nollywood industry and across the globe.

Those Sizzling Pictures of Tiwa Savage

Ferdinand Ekechukwu

Few days after Afrobeats Queen Tiwa Savage stirred her 18 million Instagram followers with series of sizzling pictures, the singer continued with more pictures of herself clad in bikini early this week. The mother of one was captured flaunting her body in different positions at a beach on Cayman Island in the first set of pictures posted.

Social media users were again wowed as the "Somebody's Son" crooner shared daring pictures taken at another location on the same Island.

The pictures alongside some videos of the 43-year-old singer cruising at the Cayman Island captivated many admirers, and left only a few people in doubt of her sexiness.

"For motivational purposes only, Cayman Island, now off to the Bahamas," she captioned one of the posts. It didn't take long for many of her fans and celebrity friends/colleagues to bombard her page with interesting comments. The post attracted over 20,000 comments in the section, with many suggesting she's showing off her new body.



Tiwa

Egbeichi Okoro:

My Artistic Endeavors Traverse Spectrum of Themes, Each Telling Unique Story

Egbeichi Egwu Okoro is an award-winning Nigerian fine artist with a background in law. She has explored various themes through her body of work, showcasing her ability to work with various mediums. As the CEO of Zinn Arts Gallery, Okoro, in this interview, talks about her career as an artist and how it impacts her work and aspirations

Can you take us through your journey as an artist with a background in law?

My journey as a fine artist with a background in law has been a dynamic exploration of creativity and legal acumen. Balancing both fields requires discipline, time management, and a deep passion for each pursuit. My legal background has instilled analytical skills and attention to detail, influencing my artistic process. The legal knowledge has enriched my artistic perspectives, allowing me to navigate complex themes.

What inspired you to become a fine artist?

Becoming a fine artist was a natural evolution, rooted in a familial legacy of artistic talent. Growing up surrounded by parents and siblings who were inherently skilled in fine arts, I absorbed their creativity and developed an innate passion for visual expression. This familial influence, coupled with my own inherent love for the craft, laid the foundation for my artistic journey.

Can you talk about the themes or subjects that you focus on in your work?

Certainly! My artistic endeavors traverse a spectrum of themes, each telling a unique story. The "African Traditional Hairstyle Series" captures the cultural depth and beauty inherent in African hairstyling traditions. "Grateful Heart" visually expresses sentiments of gratitude through the artistic rendering of human figures. "Masking" encapsulates the resilience and adaptation demanded by the COVID-19 era. The portrayal of a rumpled naira notes serves as a poignant commentary on economic challenges, symbolising a struggling economy. Meanwhile, "Read My Mind" delves into the intricacies of non-verbal communication. These diverse themes collectively form a narrative that reflects my engagement with cultural, societal, and personal facets, inviting viewers to contemplate the layers of meaning within my body of work.

What has been the most significant achievement or recognition in your career as an artist and how did it impact your work and aspirations?

Having navigated a plethora of recognitions and achievements, pinpointing the most significant is daunting. The IU McKinney Art Event, where my piece "Grateful Heart" clinched both the best overall submission and best student submission awards was a standout moment. This dual triumph among submissions from brilliant artist professors, students, and faculty members resonates deeply with me. The event's meticulous selection process, overseen by a discerning committee, highlighted the resonance of my work within the artistic community, and prevailing in two categories, especially considering the exceptional talent on display, is a testament to my exceptional prowess and abilities as a fine artist. Originating from a law school, these recognitions hold a distinctive significance as they symbolise a profound connection between my legal profile and my artistic pursuit, reinforcing my commitment to leverage on my legal background in navigating and exploring the intricate facets of my path as a fine artist. Similarly, being honored with the



Egbeichi Okoro

accolade of Artistic Excellence Award by the We Are Arts Group of Mid-Western America and being contacted by a representative of the Nigerian Embassy in Japan to have my works featured in their gallery based on the level of creativity embedded in my works were significant milestones. Winning the "54artistry N200k Reward Initiative" twice in a very competitive pool also stands out for me.

Which is your preferred medium of creative expression and why?

While I work excellently well with other mediums, my preferred medium of creative expression is charcoal, whether in compact form or as dust, applied on paper. Charcoal allows me to achieve a unique blend of precision and spontaneity in my artwork and enables me to capture intricate details in different shades. The versatility of charcoal is particularly appealing to me. I can seamlessly transition from fine lines and delicate shading to bold, expressive strokes, adding a dynamic quality to my compositions. This proficiency makes charcoal my preferred medium for bringing my creative ideas to life.

You're the CEO of Zinn Arts Gallery. What's the idea behind Zinn Arts Gallery?

The idea behind Zinn Arts Gallery is to establish a global artistic powerhouse, transcending geographical borders to become a hub for cultural exchange and economic influence through the arts. Zinn Arts Gallery aims to have branches in notable parts of the world and go beyond traditional gallery functions. In addition to being a center for art exhibitions, it will be a dynamic space that offers a spectrum of services, which includes art education and drawing sessions for all ages.

Are there any upcoming projects or exhibitions that you would like to share?

While I'm currently in the planning stages for future projects and exhibitions, I'm excited to share that I'm exploring themes that delve into the intersection of culture, technology, and societal shifts. My aim is to create immersive experiences that resonate with a diverse audience.

SHOWBIZFLAIR

Tosin Clegg 07062816737 e-mail: tosinclegg@hotmail.com

Dieko Continues Reviving Souls with Spiritual Songs, Humanitarian Projects

Tosin Clegg

Spirit and soul-lifting worshiper, Diekololami Akinlua (Nee Ademuwagun), has emerged as a beacon in gospel music, breaking through the delusions of the industry.

Her Psalms and hymns brand is not just a fraction of her musical choice but a divine plan to globally revive spiritual songs, a mission she passionately embraces. On how she gets inspiration for her music she noted that, "I get sound from my sleep and it sticks to me even after I'm fully awake. Sometime during the study of the scripture and my quiet time I get my inspiration as well."

Amidst her humble demeanor, Dieko's award-winning vocal prowess has remained steadfast since she accepted the divine mandate. Her spirit-filled songs serve as a vessel, earnestly redirecting souls and endearing her to worshippers around the world. Stepping into the limelight in 2008 after winning a gospel music talent hunt, her journey soared.

The release of her debut album "Dieko" in 2011 featured industry heavyweights like Wole Oni, Flo, Materkraft, Patricia Uwaje-King, and Kenny K'ore, solidifying her position as a force in gospel music.

Through her spirit-filled songs, Dieko continues to impact and redirect souls, leaving an indelible mark in the gospel music industry. Beyond her musical prowess, her humanitarian spirit shines through her impactful philanthropy. From sponsoring the education of primary school students in rural Kwara State to empowering widows with culinary skills, she leaves a positive imprint on diverse communities. Her love extends to underprivileged children in orphanages across the country, showcasing a multifaceted dedication to uplifting lives. Expressing why she is so passionate about humanitarian services, the music minster shared that, "I suffered a lot growing up and being raised by a single mother of seven children which I'm the last. My mother became a widow and things were hard. That's what birthed a compassion in me for widows and Orphans. By the Grace of God I have been able to keep this up over the years and I pray for the opportunities to continue doing this good works."

Dieko, as she's affectionately known, remains unwavering in her vocal prowess, earning accolades such as the Best Female Vocalist award at the Nigeria Gospel Music Awards.



Dieko

Davido to Headline BWUFEST



Davido

Tosin Clegg

This December, prepare to be transported into a world of musical enchantment as Afrobeat Sensation, Davido is set headline the upcoming 'Bear With Us Festival' (BWUFEST) slated for Wednesday, December 27, 2023 at Landmark Beach Oniru, Lagos. A maestro of melody, a virtuoso of vocals, and a true luminary of the stage, Davido stands at the pinnacle of musical brilliance. With a trailblazing career adorned with chart-topping hits and a stage presence that ignites the senses, he is not merely an entertainer but a force of sonic magic, poised to mesmerise and captivate each and every one of his fans.

This year's edition is aimed at creating a buzz as the super star artiste gears up to deliver a sensational performance. With a string of chart-topping hits, he's captured the hearts of music enthusiasts across Nigeria. With a laudable maiden edition, this year promises to be exciting as the headliner is sure prepared to give an unforgettable performance that will resonate in the hearts of the attendees.

According to Achievas Entertainment executives, Chiori Daniel Cole and Paul Cole Chiori, the festival was back on a bigger and better scale, noted that it would see to delivery of quality entertainment laced with surprise artistes and exceptional DJs.

From his debut single, "Back When" in May 2011 to chart-toppers like Dami Duro, Aye, Skelewu, Overseas, Gobe and down to his latest album, "Timeless," released on March 31, 2023, through Davido Music Worldwide, Columbia Records, and Sony Music Entertainment fans can expect to embark on a musical journey like no other as he takes the spotlight and elevates the night to extraordinary heights.

Yewande Gold Continues Delivering Gospel Harmonies Seasoned with Afro Rhythms

Tosin Clegg

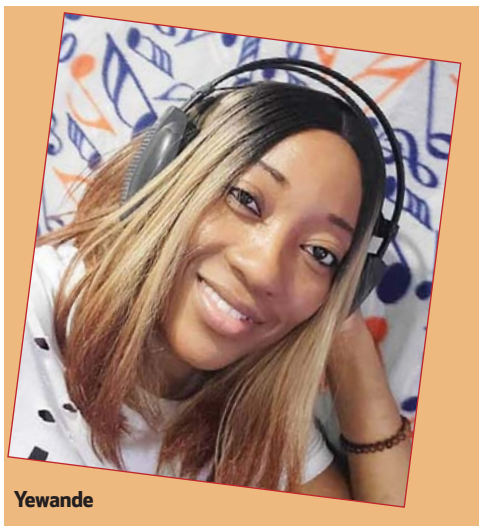
The Nigerian music scene has relentlessly spurred music talents year after year as it continues to grow its hold on the African and global music scenes. A testament of which are the multiple Grammy nominations and winnings, charts topping, sold out international concert and more. Emerging into this path is Yewande Gold who weaves sonic tapestries with her unparalleled creativity. A trailblazer in the music realm, she commands the stage with a magnetic presence, leaving audiences enchanted by the rhythm of her soulful voice and the brilliance of her artistry.

She recently stormed the music scene with the release of two inspirational songs that talks about life's challenges and the ability to trust in God no matter the situation.

Starting music early she developed an interest in and appreciation for different musical styles she was exposed to growing up, like gospel, soul, reggae, country and classical music. This inspired her to go professional later in life and speaking about her transition, she mentioned that singing was part of her life, "I have always known I would go professional someday because of the passion I have for music, I started singing and writing songs at an early age of seven years and was encouraged by my parents and siblings who stood by me all the way."

Gold's music is a fusion of classical soulful melodic vocals and gospel harmonies with Afro rhythms.

The singer-songwriter wants to create music that is relatable and inspiring. Some of her (solo and group) performances in the United States and Nigeria include a Pirates of Penzance Operetta, Celebration of Commonwealth Nations event, a Merchant of Venice musical (stage play), Minnesota (State Fair and) Duluth Bayfront Reggae & World Music Festival, Twin Cities Caribbean Festival, and Minnesota's Dakota Jazz Club.



Yewande

Hess King, Major 7th Band Set for US Tour as They Continue to Defy Odds

Tosin Clegg

Electrifying and energy driven performer, Hess King is an artiste who readily comes to mind when one needs to relish the dynamic and exhilarating fusions of all kinds of music genres serving it as beautifully and commanding as possible. The artiste, whose real name is Akanji Abiodun Samuel is undeniably a musical genius whose origin of Fuji back in the 80s when his father played helped shape his musical journey into becoming a master at his craft singing and performing all genres of music as well as his main core which is Afrofusion.

Reminiscing on how it all started, he said, "My father was a Fuji musician back in the 80s and I grew up to meet him doing shows. He was contemporaries with the likes of musical powerhouses such as Wasiu Ayinde Marshall, Barrister among others who were the rave of musicians back then.

"I got to discover myself later while I was living with a friend when I thought of what to call myself which would sound catchy and appealing. So I prayed and I caught a scripture in the book of Galatians.

"Curling out the message that I would be Honoured, Enthroned as a son and be a soldier of a king. So I put the words together in acronyms and coined it together as Hess King. I can practically say I have been a musician all my life and started discovering and improving my music at an early stage."

His style of music promptly strikes a chord with any listener who hears him as he predominantly centers his music around percussions such as the talking drums, the horns and lastly his voice which he regards as his last instrument. With a musical journey so blessed he is set to embark on a much anticipated United States tour in 2024 with his Major 7th Band.

Vivid Imagination Opens Ultra-modern Showroom

Tosin Clegg

A brother and his two sisters, Godwin, Bimbo and Dupe, embarked on a business journey 33 years ago. The trio, hitherto, were into the importation of furniture and other household items until a government policy, which they considered unfavorable, forced them to refocus and redirect their business. The result of that decision is Vivid Imagination, which is today, one of Nigeria's biggest and leading fashion brands.

Situated for decades at Falemi House, along the ever busy Ikorodu Road, in Obanikoro, Lagos, the company, recently opened its newly completed multi-purpose and multi million Naira headquarters in Ilupeju, Lagos.

Situated in the serene neighborhood of Johnson Street, the new Vivid Imagination facility is such a beauty to behold. Occupying an entire premises, there's an irresistible showroom to welcome you on arrival. The ambience of the facility is warm, welcoming and truly reflects the "style and elegance personified" motto of the company.

The Managing Director of the company, Godwin Mekwuye, took journalists on a roller coaster of how it all began as well as how its operations has been running for 33 solid years.

"Whatever we are today has been through the grace of God and also thanks to God", he started.

"Sincerely, I think that God just loves me and has chosen to show me mercy. Other than our resilience and tenacity, I don't think that we have done anything extraordinary except to enjoy God's grace and mercy as a business."

Shedding more light on God's special kindness to him and the business, he recalled a fire incident that consumed goods and machines worth millions of Naira and how he recovered from it.

The horrible incident occurred on February 9, 2018. "That I could get over it, considering the enormity of the loss, is still a miracle and thanks to God. Over nine trailers were used for the evacuation of debris from our premises. That would tell you the enormity of our loss," he added.



L-R: AIG Tunji Alapini (rtd), Chief Dele Momodu, Mr. Godwin Mekwuye and Prince Ademola Aderemi, at the launch of the new Vivid Imagination showroom in Lagos... recently

FEATURES

Iconic Pearl of Africa

Charles Ajunwa *shares his experience from the Explore Uganda trip organised by the Uganda Tourism Board*

Like all humans, I was initially afraid of embarking on the 2023 Explore Uganda familiarisation trip organised by the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) after signing the indemnity form, which among others, clearly stated that "certain risks and dangers may exist, including but not limited to hazards of travelling, accidents or illness in remote places without medical facilities, the forces of nature and travel by air, automobile or other means. The risks for this fam trip are risks associated with the adventurous nature of the itinerary."

But having secured three months' tourist visa in addition to research carried out on Uganda showing that the country has one of the best security systems, happiest people in East Africa and friendliest in the world, I shook off the initial fears and opted to embark on the fam trip to expand my worldview and satisfy my curiosity as a journalist.

Further research showed that what sets Uganda apart from other African destinations are the stunning scenery, rich culture, and tourism products it offers such as wildlife safaris, cultural experiences and adventure activities.

The seven-day Explore Uganda trip also had no financial implication on all the selected participants from Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia, as the UTB whose mandate was to promote Uganda as a premier tourist destination in Africa, provided all necessary logistical arrangements, including transportation, accommodation and meals.

After arranging my clothes, all necessary documents, other items and observing our family prayers on Saturday night, I left my house early on Sunday, December 3 straight to the new terminal at Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Lagos. This was to enable me complete all the immigration processes before my flight at 11a.m. with the Uganda Airlines to Entebbe, Uganda. To my amazement, all facilities at the new terminal building adjacent to the old terminal presently undergoing renovation, were top-notch. With tight security in and around, the presence of touts has drastically reduced. I heaved a sigh of relief!

Nigeria and Uganda in October this year, signed a direct flight Bilateral Air Services Agreement (BASA), which is aimed at improving air travel and businesses between both countries. Although the airplane from Entebbe arrived Lagos an hour before the scheduled flight, for some unexplained reasons the flight was delayed for another hour. Uganda is two hours ahead of Nigeria. Originally, the flight from Lagos was to take off at 11a.m. Nigerian time (which is 1p.m. Ugandan time). One of the airlines' staff came and apologised to passengers for the delay. Later, buses were provided to convey all passengers to the base of the airplane. After all the passengers boarded, the pilot apologised for the delay. We took off at 12 noon, Nigerian time which is 2p.m. Ugandan time.

The airplane, which is one of the newest Airbus has four well-furnished compartments for - First Class, Business and Economy. The seat arrangement and interior decor were mind-blowing. The logo of Uganda Airlines which is a crane, and motto: 'Fly the crane to the Pearl of Africa' clearly were embossed on the seats and other materials served inside the aircraft.

All passengers on board the airplane were lavishly treated with food and drinks. For passengers' comfort and relaxation, different entertainment films were made available through a small screen in front of the passenger's seat. The pilot any time there was turbulence will ask all passengers to be on their safety belts. Well-dressed stewards attended to passengers politely with smiles on their faces.

Arrives Uganda On Wings of the Crane

As the airplane approached the Ugandan airspace, the beautiful landscape of the Pearl of Africa started emerging like a damsel yet to be deflowered by natural elements. The lush green vegetation, hills and mountains of different sizes and lakes were breath-taking! No wonder, the famous Winston Churchill coined the nickname "The Pearl of Africa" in 1908, to convey the beauty, variety, and natural wealth of the land. Since then, Uganda has grown into one of Africa's most coveted travel sojourns.

As I disembarked from the airplane, I went straight to the immigration hall to complete our passport documentation. The immigration officer that attended to me was very polite. He asked for my flight ticket and approval letter for visa from the Uganda Embassy, including my mission



Aerial view of Kampala... A city on the hills

to Uganda. After checking my documents, he finally asked me to take my fingerprints, and later stamped my visa on arrival on my passport. From there, I moved to the luggage hall to pick up my box. With all clearance completed, we proceeded outside the hall to meet our driver - Andrew who had waited patiently for us. After welcoming us and taking our luggage to where he packed, he entered the vehicle and brought out a Ugandan flag, face cap, a mug and a handy publication describing the country's heritage, which he later presented to each person before taking us to Sheraton Hotels in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. We took pictures before leaving Entebbe Airport.

Construction work to expand the airport was still ongoing. The driver took us to where he bought a ticket to enable him to cross the tollgate. As the driver hit the road to our hotel in the night, the beauty of the country began to emerge, sprawling beautiful lakes, houses on hills, bridges, cars, motorcycles appeared as we meandered the roads. The traffic lights worked perfectly well. It took us almost an hour to arrive at the Sheraton Hotel in Kampala. A little distance from the hotel, we saw Christmas lights of different shapes lit up the whole place. That reminded us that the Christmas season is around the corner. Mr. Donald, a representative of Uganda Tourism Board was on ground to receive the Nigerian team. After completing the security check at the entrance of the hotel, we checked-in at the front desk and went straight for dinner before dispersing to our rooms. Donald reminded us that we will be meeting the next day to strategise with the entire Explore Uganda team.

On Monday morning, we had breakfast at the restaurant where Donald briefed us about the Explore Uganda fam trip while Mr. Anthony Ochieng, who is the chief consultant, kept communicating with us through our team platform. As the Explore Uganda team checked-out from Sheraton Hotel in Kampala, we were taken to a bureau de exchange at Plot 8, Nita Building, Colville Street, for those who want to exchange foreign currencies for Ugandan Shillings.

Uganda has 10 national parks namely: Rwenzori Mountains National Park (The mystical challenge), Mt. Elgon National Park (World's largest caldera), Mgahinga Gorilla National Park (Where Gold meets silver), Murchison Falls National Park (The world's most powerful waterfall), Lake Mburo National Park (Whispers of the wild), Semuliki National Park (The true bitders' haven), Kibale National Park (The primate capital of the world), Queen Elizabeth National Park (Medley of wonders), and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (The ultimate gorilla experience). As part of our itinerary, the last four national parks were selected for us to visit during the Explore Uganda fam trip.

Thrilling Trip to Kibale National Park

The Explore Uganda team left for Kibale National Park in Western Uganda, which is 358kms from Kampala, approximately a 6 hours journey. As we hit the road to Kibale, there were several stopovers along the roads for people to refresh. Apart from chains of hills with different amazing shapes and forms, the banana, plantain, tea, callisters plantations were everywhere, and callisters occupied every available space. The locals built houses along the major roads making it easier for travellers to stop, interact and buy items from them. This ensured that the roads are safer for travellers with little or no police presence. With the narrow roads and sharp curves on hills, drivers plying the roads maintain controllable speed limits in order to avoid unnecessary accidents. A few kilometres to Kibale National Park, a hoard of baboons started coming to roads from the thick rainforests. They refuse to leave the road as vehicles approach them. Some put out their hands begging for bananas. Though many of these baboons have met their untimely deaths by speeding vehicles, drivers on their part apply caution by avoiding hitting the primates.

As the weather was getting darker with flashy rains, we passed through the entrance of the Kibale National Park along the road. The two drivers- Andrew and Rooney took us straight to Chimpundu Lodge, where we were warmly received by the staff who first gave us hot towels to clean our hands and faces after a six-hour journey. The icing on the cake was the cold watermelon drink they served us. I gushed mine with every strength I could muster. The lodge is built right inside the rainforest with each cottage separated by strong wooden platforms. Each of the over 20 cottages were named after chimpanzee species for easy identification. My room is Rukara 02. From my room, I hear sounds of wildlife and rustling trees. The birds in the forest released melodious songs which keep echoing into my ears. The cuisines for lunch and dinner for two nights we stayed at the lodge were delicious, spiced with fresh local vegetables. I enjoyed eating Matooke, Uganda's staple food. The dish is made by boiling and mashing green plantain bananas. The lodge also has a swimming pool for relaxation and spa which offers steaming and massages to keep tourists fit.

As part of the itinerary on Tuesday, which is day three, after having our breakfast, the team left for Kibale National Park to get a permit for the chimpanzee Tracking in the afternoon.

A Trip to Forte Portal

Immediately the permit was secured by Donald, the entire team proceeded to Forte Portal City still in Western Uganda, which is about an hour drive. The tour guide, Ignatius Amooti, was on ground to receive the team. After giving instructions about the tour, he ensured that everybody had a walking stick and wore rubber booths into the forest. He took us through the thick forest, explaining some of the plant species before exiting to the warm embrace of Amabere Caves (breast caves), which is right in front of the Nyakasura Water Falls. The water from the rocks has little salt taste.

From there, we moved to the home of Crater Lakes in Uganda. The tour guide, Ignatius, took us to Kyeganyewa Hill, which is 1,697 feet above sea level. From the base of the hill, two crater lakes stood out. Some of us who managed to climb to the top of the hill saw three crater lakes. We hoisted the Ugandan flag and danced around in excitement. But descending the hill was another tough task as many of us gasped for breath. This is where the walking stick helped most of us to make it to the ground.

Breathtaking Chimpanzee Tracking

The Explore Uganda team headed back to Kibale National Park for the chimpanzee Tracking. On arrival, we waited at the entrance to the national park for a proper security check to be conducted before final clearance. We were ushered into a small hall by the tour guide who spoke fluent English. We were told to keep a distance of 10 metres when any animal is sighted, no feeding of animals and no noise in order not to scare them away. The team was divided into two for easy tracking. Rangers and porters were also attached to the two groups.

Kibale National Park is in western Uganda, protecting moist evergreen rainforest. It is 766 square kilometres (296 sq mi) in size and ranges between 1,100 metres (3,600 ft) and 1,600 metres (5,200 ft) in elevation. Despite encompassing primarily moist evergreen forest, it contains a diverse array of landscapes. Kibale is one of the last remaining portions to contain both lowland and montane forests. In eastern Africa, it sustains the last significant expanse of pre-montane forest. The park was gazetted in 1932 and formally established in 1993 to protect a large area of forest previously managed as a logged forest reserve. The park forms a continuous forest with Queen Elizabeth National Park. This adjoining of the parks creates a 180 kilometres (110mi) wildlife corridor. It is an important ecotourism and safari destination, well-known for its population of habituated chimpanzees and 12 other species of primates. It is also the location of the Makerere University Biological Field Station.

We had a clement weather as we alighted from the vehicles and entered the thick rainforest for the chimpanzee tracking. The tracking most times takes six to eight before the chimpanzees could be sighted. Most times they cannot be sighted at all. But as mother nature will have, in less than 20 minutes the tracking commenced, the forest rangers sighted two chimpanzees on the floor of the trees. Shortly after they spotted the chimpanzees, rain came down heavily forcing the chimps to look for shelter under the trees. We quickly put on our raincoats. After spending about an hour with the primates on tree tops and on ground, the entire team headed back to the road to catch up with the drivers. We also saw a fig tree that is over 100 years old in the Kibale rain forest. The slippery nature of the thick forest coupled with the heavy rains some people stumbled on the ground like babies learning to walk. On arrival at the park, everyone in the Explore Uganda team was presented with a Chimpanzee Tracking Certificate signed by the Executive Director and Conservation Area Manager in the Uganda Wildlife Authority.

After collection of certificates, we headed back to Chimpundu Lodge, which was about 10 minutes drive from Kibale National Park. On arrival, the waiters told us to remove our shoes for washing at no cost, and we were given hot towels to clean our hands and faces. We went straight to our rooms to refresh and take some nap after a tedious day. Others later went to the pool side to relax while others opted for massage.

After dinner, some opted to have fun by drinking, making jokes and playing different types of games. After all, we are humans. The games lasted deep into the night. Oblivious of our journey next day being Wednesday, some sneaked out to arrange their things.

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FEATURES

Demola Seriki Remembered by Wife Wosilat, Children, Associates

Bennett Oghifo



L-R: Daughter, Ms. Bisola Dejonwo; widow, Mrs. Wosilat Okoya-Seriki, daughter of the deceased, Alimah Araoye and her husband, Makinde Araoye, at the Special Muslim Prayer for one-year Remembrance of late Ademola Seriki organised by his widow, Wosilat in Lagos… yesterday

Exactly one year after his painful demise in faraway Madrid, capital of Spain, Chief Ademola Rasaq Seriki (CON), former Nigerian Minister of State for Defence and Ambassador to Spain was remembered with a Fidau prayer yesterday, December 15, 2023.

The ceremony was organised by his loving wife, Wosilat Okoya-Seriki and her children, Abisola Dejonwo, Faridah Demola-Seriki and Alimah Araoye. Wosilat was by his side in the Spanish capital when he breathed his last.

The special Muslim prayer for the late Amb. Seriki, held at the Island Club's Peacock Hall, Onikan, Lagos, was led by the Imams of Lagos Central Mosque, while the Guest Lecturer was Dr. Saheed Timehin, Associate Professor, Lagos State University (LASU).

Dignitaries from all walks of life, including former Senator Lagos West, Gbenga Asafa, Mutiu Aare, Tunde Salau, Wosilat Okoya-Seriki, Shade Okoya, brother of the widow, Tajudeen Okoya and representatives of the Oba of Lagos joined the families to grace the event.

In his lecture, Dr. Timehin encouraged his family, friends and loved ones to be full of good deeds because, according to him, the only thing that will be left with everyone with his Lord in the grave and hereafter is good deeds.

Eulogising the departed while concluding the lecture, he said, "It was because of the good and fulfilled life that Ambassador Ademola Rasaq Seriki lived that all of us are gathered here today to pray for him. May Allah continue to repose his soul in Al-Jannah Al-Firdaus."

Speaking of her departed husband, Wosilat Okoya-Seriki described life in the last 365 days without him as uneasy. "The last 365 days have been tough and extremely lonely without him. We shared so many lovely memories together. I thank the Almighty Allah for everything thus far.

"His last moments were with his family, although we felt a deep pain, we remained strong, especially as he had accepted it as Allah's will. He was my best friend, and we had a deep bond and friendship. I miss everything about him. Life has not been the same since his passing.

"He was a very good life partner to me and a wonderful father," Wosilat said, adding that if there were to be another world, she would marry him again. May Allah SWT forgive his shortcomings and grant him the highest place in Jannah, amin," she prayed.

Encomiums and goodwill messages poured at yesterday's fidau prayers for the late ambassador. It was rather symptomatic of the fact that Demola Seriki lived a well-spent life and had been loved in his lifetime and his memory has become one uneasy to be wished away in hurry even one year after his death.

He continues to be remembered as the genuine family man that he was, even now in death. Demola Seriki came to this world, he saw and evidence abounds that he conquered, considering the fact of footprints he left behind in the sands of time and his beautiful memories, as well as his numerous outstanding accomplishments.

Giving tribute to the departed, an associate of the late Ambassador, Mutiu Aare, said he was a good man who encouraged all his friends to do good, especially during the month of Ramadan. He prayed that Allah should continue to repose his soul in Al-Jannah.

Also giving tribute to the departed, his political associate, Senator Abdul Bariu Gbenga Asafa said, "Rasaq Ademola Seriki was my younger one but we were friends. Of all that were close to him, I was one particular person. I believe it is because of this I was asked to be here today.

"However, no matter how good a man is, he will always have his shortcomings. But Seriki was somebody that when you met him once, you would fall in love with him and continue to see him again and again. He was a good family man. He loved his children and did not joke with their matter.

"Like the lecturer said that we should encourage ourselves to do good towards one another, I remember that when Demola Seriki was Minister of State for Defence, I knew how many people he helped. Death gives no notice, therefore, we should do good because I believe that the good done by Seriki is part of the reason this prayer gathering befits him today, and prayers will go and meet him in the grave. May Allah repose his soul in Al-Jannah."

Demola Seriki, as he was popularly called, died in active service while serving concurrently as Nigerian Ambassador to Spain and Permanent Representative to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) on December 15, 2022, aged 63.

Born on November 30, 1959 in Lagos, Demola Seriki, a Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON), was not only a Nigerian politician, teacher, businessman and public administrator, whose ambassadorial duty he assumed in January 2021 but a loyal party man to the core, which endeared him to all and sundry as he, in his own right, possessed high level of intelligence, consistency and hard-working spirit that saw him rise through the ranks to the top in his political career.

Empowering African Tech Founders with Mentorship, Funding, Resources

Sunday Okobi

The State of Tech in Africa report for second quarter (Q2) by Tech Cabal revealed compelling insights which indicated significant growth on the continent's tech ecosystem across diverse sectors.

From the report, startups have transitioned from emerging entities to well-established names, which now play pivotal roles in shaping the African digital economy.

Notably, the period has witnessed an impressive fundraising total surpassing $916 million, with the fintech sector securing the highest funding at $487 million. However, despite these remarkable achievements, specific instances still highlight gaps in sector-specific knowledge.

In the past years, Africa's entrepreneurship sphere has been inundated with reports highlighting ethical lapses in workplaces, scandals involving founders, leadership deficiencies among top executives, instances of mismanagement of investors' funds, and a lack of funds to scale up operations. Some experts attribute these issues to a dearth of necessary training for founders and startup leaders, while others point to a lack of entrepreneurship skills. Despite these challenges, new businesses have continued to emerge, seed rounds are successfully raised, and fresh frontiers are explored. Against this backdrop, as the continent experiences a surge in entrepreneurial zeal and technological progress, the Beyond Limits Fellowship has decided to play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Africa's dynamic technological landscape.

Background of Beyond Limits Fellowship

Over the years, numerous fellowships, incubators, and accelerator programmes have emerged in the technology and entrepreneurship sectors in Africa. Many of these initiatives were established with the genuine intention of supporting founders, and some have successfully fulfilled this mission. Nevertheless, a significant knowledge gap persists, and, as is often the case with such gaps, it has had an impact on the entrepreneurial landscape of the African continent. An article from the 'Rest of the World' highlights the challenges faced by Africa's B2B e-commerce startups, once favoured by investors, which are now grappling with survival issues, including employee layoffs and operational cutbacks. Instances like these echo the problems that the Beyond Limits Fellowship is aimed to address.

The Beyond Limits Fellowship for Founders Programme is an immersive six-week learning experience designed to assist start-up founders with skill development across several critical domains: leadership, product and marketing, people and culture, funding and finance, operations, and excellence. The inception of this fellowship marks a significant chapter in the narrative of fostering innovation and leadership within the ever-expanding landscape of technology and business. Rooted in a vision to transcend traditional boundaries and redefine the limits of what aspiring entrepreneurs can achieve, this fellowship, according to the stakeholders of the programme, is more than just a programme, "it's a transformative force."

They stated that the fellowship's background is characterised by a commitment and dedication to address the gaps in leadership, skills, and resources.

"It endeavours to provide a platform that does not only educate, but also inspire and connect like-minded individuals striving to make a significant impact. With a focus on innovation and sustainable growth, Beyond Limits Fellowship sets out to nurture a community of trailblazers, equipping them with the tools and knowledge needed to push the boundaries of what's achievable in the realms of technology and entrepreneurship," the Chief Executive Officer of Emergency Response Africa, Folakemi Owodunni, said in a statement.

Significance of Beyond Limits Fellowship

The African tech industry, according to experts and stakeholders in the industry, is rapidly evolving, and this means, staying ahead of the competition is now more crucial than ever. Daily, the continent witnesses a new startup trying to solve a problem, partnerships among existing startups, and funding. With these advancements occurring at a fast pace and innovations constantly emerging, professionals must keep up with the latest trends and developments. The technological landscape in Africa is undergoing swift transformations, emphasising the heightened importance of staying ahead in a fiercely competitive environment. Each day brings news of fresh startups tackling diverse challenges, collaborations among existing ventures, and notable funding developments. In this fast-paced evolution, where innovations continually surface, it becomes imperative for professionals to actively pursue and embrace the latest trends and advancements to remain relevant and competitive. For the Beyond Limits Fellowship, there is an opportunity to help these professionals and founders embrace these latest advancements.

Fellowship Success Stories

Owodunni said: "We appreciate the connection and the opportunity to be face-to-face with industry heavyweights and hear how they have been able to make an impact while also sharing what we are looking to achieve with healthcare in Africa." She noted that a visit to the fellowship's page would provide an avenue to discover similar testimonials and more.

According to the Chief Executive Officer of Emergency Response Africa, "In Africa, the endeavour to create a significant impact and provide support to founders has evolved, but substantiating these initiatives with tangible evidence remains a significant issue.

"Beyond this challenge, the rarity of assembling leading professionals in the tech sector who are not only willing to aid others in their success but also support winners with grants is noteworthy."

Also, the Director of Innovation and Tech at Beyond Limits, Fikun Aluko, stated that the primary reason for these grants was to support sectors that are often overlooked due to extended ROI but are essential for the economy and the African continent.

He stated that with a faculty comprising seasoned industry leaders such as Founder of Beyond Limits and former Director at Google West Africa, Dr. Juliet Ehimuan; Co-Founder of Future Africa/Flutterwave, Iyin Aboyeji; the CEO of Aspire Coronation Trust Foundation, Osayi Alile; as well as Uche Pedro, who is the founder and CEO of BellaNaija, "the fellowship offers early-stage founders a chance to embark on a transformative entrepreneurial journey. This transformative experience encompasses mentorship opportunities, substantial funding and grants, a tailored curriculum, a resource hub, and valuable networking prospects."

Aluko disclosed that in the recently concluded 2023 edition, a cohort of 26 startups spanning six countries and 12 sectors across Africa, including fintech, agricultural tech, sports, arts, edutech and accounting tech played major roles. He added that it is significant that these selected startups are now being well-placed to bring forth fresh perspectives and innovations to enrich the entrepreneurship landscape across the continent.

Fellowship's Role in Shaping Africa's Future

The 2023 African Economic Outlook published by the African Development Bank Group recently disclosed that multiple shocks, including disruptions to global supply chains and a tightening of global financing conditions, have reduced the continent's real GDP from 4.8 percent in 2021 to 3.8 percent in 2022.

Despite these shocks, the African region is projected to grow at the second-fastest rate in the world in 2023 to 2024. For this to happen, however, a mix of short-term and medium-to-long-term policies is needed to accelerate and sustain the growth momentum.

One of such efforts is the introduction of leadership and other training opportunities by the Beyond Limits Fellowship for early-stage founders. An article on Technext recently decried the reduced growth rate of the continent but also mulled its ability to return to the growth rates.

It said: "But if it is to do so while also shielding itself from further global economic shocks, it has to look beyond the factors that drove its first wave of growth. One way to do that is to ensure that the region's startups have the support and conditions they need to help fuel the continent's next wave of growth.

AUTO WORLD

Bennett Oghifo

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L-R: Director General of the National Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDC), Joseph Osanipin; Managing Director, Toyota Nigeria Limited, Mr. Kunle Ade-Ojo; Founder/Chairman, NORD Automobile, Tobi Ajayi; and Director of Sales and Marketing, Jet Systems, Sanjay Rupani, at NAJA 2023 auto Awards night in Lagos… recently

Honda HR-V Emerges NAJA Car of The Year, Toyota, Coscharis, Mikano, Mercedes-Benz, Others Win Big

Honda HR-V has emerged Car-of-the-Year at the 2023 Nigeria Auto Journalists Association (NAJA) Awards that took place in Lagos this week.

The awards was attended by all the known automotive dealerships and assemblers in Nigeria, including most of their Chief Executive Officers and top management staff.

The Director General of the National Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDC), Joseph Osanipin, who was the Guest Speaker, challenged the distinguished stakeholders in the automotive industry attending the event, saying, "What is the future of the automotive industry? And by now, we should be looking at the industry and be taking steps towards that future we desire. We need to challenge ourselves now."

The NADDC Director General said, the federal government has played its part by establishing the Nigerian Automotive Policy and that the policy will work only if the stakeholders in the automotive industry implement it.

Osanipin said, "The government can come up with a policy, yes, the policy can come, but majorly, the practitioners and the stakeholders are the ones to implement whatever policy is put in place and if the policy will work or not, depends on us.

"What that means is, we are the ones that will determine where the automotive sector is going in Nigeria and I challenge all of us to now start thinking what we can do differently to bridge the gap. We have a lot of gaps in the system. What can we do to start bringing the gap? What can we do to increase the capacity, our local production of vehicles? We need to start working towards that. Let us strategise and come up with what we can do and do better."

He then urged the NAJA to include an award category for 'Award of Components Parts Manufacturer of the year', saying, "You know, without the components, you cannot have the whole. Components come together to make the whole. So please, let us start thinking about the whole. How can we start developing these components, because this is how we can grow our local contents. If we can do that, encourage them the way we encourage the big guys we will achieve our desired goal. Let us start encouraging the little guys so that we can pull them up. What can we do? What can we start sourcing locally to add to our local contents? We have a lot of things that can be sourced locally to add to our local contents.

"We have foams that we use for your chairs, we have plastics, you have glass that you use for your mirror, your windscreen. Let us start thinking."

About the awards, he said, "In any competition like this, only one person will win the award for a particular category.

Mikano Motors Hosts Gala Night to Celebrate Partnership with Changan Autos

Mikano Motors celebrated its collaboration with Changan Autos, solidifying their presence and growth trajectory in the Nigerian market.

The exclusive Gala Night, held on December 7, 2023, commemorated the official partnership between Mikano Motors and Changan Autos. This partnership solidified Changan Autos as Mikano Motors' latest exclusive brand partner, fostering a union built on innovation, excellence, and a shared vision for the future.

The event was held at the Royal Box by Cube 65, an exquisite event centre situated at Adeola Odeku m, Victoria Island, Lagos .Beyond the celebrations, the attendees enjoyed an immersive experience highlighting the performance and innovation of the Changan brand. It offered a glimpse into the exciting future of the collaboration.

The event served as a platform to extend heartfelt appreciation to esteemed stakeholders – valued clients, dedicated brand promoters, unwavering supporters, and the tireless individuals who have significantly contributed to the realization of Mikano's ambitious goals.

The Chairman of Mikano International, Mofid Karameh, expressed immense gratitude to attendees. He reiterated the commitment of the company to provide valuable products to the Nigerian marketplace, mentioning the partnership with Rolls Royce to improve power generation in Nigeria.



L-R: Head of Marketing, Mikano Motors, Mrs Karima Okunola; Chairman/CEO, Asia Group of Companies, Alhaji Sani Isa; Chairman/CEO, Mikano International Limited, Mr. Mofid Karameh; General Manager, Asia Group of Companies, Hajiyah Habibah Abubakar Yusuf; Operation Manager, Mikano Motors, Syam Abdulkadir; during the Mikano Motors Gala night Launch of Changan Auto in Lagos… recently

Tracy Huang, Changan's Director of African Region, in her address said Changan would, in collaboration with Mikano Motors, ""continue to innovate and provide the best services in the ecosystem".

Ralph Haidar, Managing Director at Mikano Motors, stated, "One of the most notable traits of Nigerians is their affinity for quality. We translate our understanding of the unique Nigerian tastes and preferences to providing quality products and services for you"

Coscharis Motors, BMW Headlines BMW Club at 10 Celebration in Nigeria

Coscharis Motors, the exclusive representative of the iconic BMW brand in Nigeria, is headlining this year's BMW Club's Autofest and the 10th Anniversary edition as the major sponsor in Lagos on the 17th and 23rd of December, 2023.

According to the General Manager, Marketing and Corporate Communications, Coscharis Group, Abiona Babarinde, "Coscharis and BMW are really excited to headline this years' Autofest to celebrate the BMW brand to wrap up the year in a special way. This is equally to show support to BMW Club for their consistency during the past ten years in showcasing the premiumness of the BMW brand amongst their members and beyond. This years' edition is special in all ramification as our collaboration with the Club will cover giving back to the society via the Corporate Social Responsibility platform where we visit and donate to victims of road accidents in Nigeria amongst other lined up activities. Aside showcasing new BMW variants (vehicles and Bikes) on display from our dealership, we equally have lots of exciting offerings for existing BMW owners from our Aftersales team that will be fully on ground. In a nutshell, this years' Autofest stands to delight all BMW enthusiasts by giving a total BMW experience together with possible conquest from other brand owners as the event promises to be fun – filled."

In his words, Cosmas Junior Maduka, Executive Director, Aftersales, Coscharis Group said, "Coscharis Aftersales team will practically bring its mobile workshop to the event location to offer services like free on the spot diagnosis and diagnosis report. 15% discount on parts purchased or requested during the event. 20% discount on service booking at the event. Complimentary BMW foot mat for Parts purchase above N500, 000 amongst others".

The leadership of the BMW Club has promised an exciting time all through this year's Autofest with all arrangements in top notch from tight security to providing good ambience with free flow traffic control courtesy of the State agencies.

OSR Cruise Launches Mobility App Redefining Transportation in Nigeria

OSR Cruise, a dynamic mobility startup, launches its innovative APP designed to reshape the way people move and connect.

OSR Cruise introduces an all-encompassing APP solution that goes beyond traditional ride-hailing, encompassing ride-sharing, car rental, and delivery services.

Key Features:: Ride Hailing: OSR provides users with access to a fleet of stylish and reliable vehicles, ensuring a comfortable journey at their fingertips.

Ride Sharing: Embracing the spirit of community, OSR's ride-sharing feature allows users to share their journey, split the fare, and build connections along the way.

Car Renting: OSR understands the need for flexibility. Users can now conveniently rent a car for a day or more, tailoring their transportation to fit their unique schedules.

Delivery Services: OSR expands its reach beyond passengers with a dedicated delivery service, promising swift and secure parcel transportation.

Why OSR?: Stylish Rides: OSR's fleet comprises sleek and comfortable vehicles, ensuring a stylish commute for users.

Flexible Options: OSR offers a range of services catering to diverse mobility needs, providing users with the flexibility to choose what suits them best.

Transparent Pricing: OSR is committed to transparency, ensuring users experience fair and straightforward pricing without hidden costs.

Community Connection: Join a thriving community of riders and drivers, fostering connections beyond just transportation.

PERSONAL FINANCE

with Omolabake Fasogbon... 08155131874



Embracing Digital Savings Platforms to Manage Your Spending

Omolabake Fasogbon

Given the present economic realities and high cost of living, there is now high propensity to spend and the unwillingness to save. Recent World Bank's Global Findex Database showed that savings have dropped to a 10-year low in Nigeria.

According to expert, many Nigerians have continued to live below poverty line not necessarily because they have low incomes or poor salaries, but perhaps, lack savings and investment culture. Some have argued that poor savings is rubbing off negatively on the country's investments profile.

The reality however remains that these days, many have not had enough to spend, let alone put some money aside, while some are natural spendthrift.

The importance of savings, amid little or excess, and especially this period cannot be argued. The secret is discipline, by keying into the words of American businessman, Warren Buffet who says "Do not save what is left after spending, but spend what is left after savings."

With the rise of fintechs, providing more access to digital landscape and information, savings come more simple, safe and rewarding too. This is further aided by current banking reforms.

Rather than confining that money to piggybank at home which comes with the risk of theft and temptation to squander on frivolities, among others, why not subscribe to a fintech app, a withdrawal restriction plan for that matter?

This makes more sense in that individuals or businesses are able to save and get rewarded, access credit facilities, control and track their spending with just a tap on their phone.

SMEs can also ensure good financial planning for short and long-term returns to generate earnings to keep their businesses running.

One of such fintech platforms that can be considered, especially this period is BaigeWallet, which boasts of unique offerings that takes the reality of Nigeria's environment into cognisance.

The company recently took a step further to incentivise savings with a promo initiative tagged '12 Days of Christmas campaign'.

The aim is to instill savings attitude in Nigerians, even as Chief Executive Officer of the company, Fisayo Bejide acknowledged declining savings culture in the country.

With the initiative, individuals and small businesses stand a chance to win up to N150, 000 in any of the company's saving plans, including: "No Access, Just Save and Save for a Need," and still earn as high as nine to 15 per cent interest rate by saving a minimum of N2,000 consistently.

Bejide, said savings plans are created for risk-tolerant investors to earn capital gains and interest on the collective performance of their investment portfolio within a minimum of six months.

"Furthermore, individuals can track their spending on the app daily by opening it to see their savings, interest accrued, and growth frequency.

"Interests accumulate daily and are paid at the end of a plan, and accumulation is dependent on the amount dedicated to the various plans for earnings," he added.

He disclosed further that that the incentive on savings, coupled with its timing, was deliberate and strategic to enable Nigerians plan their finances properly in the coming year.

"By encouraging users to save over 12 times consistently this season, it is expected that they will be accustomed to savings and get more serious about it in the new year.

"Besides, 12 lucky savers stand a chance to win in the over N1 million cash reward devoted to the promo. Winners either get rewarded with N150, 000, N100, 000 and N50, 000. This is to enable them to have a great Christmas and save for next year, "he clarified.

"The platform has an easy interface enhancing a good user experience to navigate and make good savings and investment decisions for them to reach their financial goals," he added.

He emphasised savings in the coming year given macroeconomics demands as well as foreign exchange challenges and inflation.

"Individuals and families must plan effectively to live up to their means," he maintained.

A close analysis of the company's savings plans show they come so flexible. For instance, the 'Save a Need,' option which starts with N5,000 was designed for specific needs and emergency while savers are only allowed to withdraw four times in a year. The 'No Access Plan' denies a saver from withdrawing until maturity period.

Subscribers gain more based on their saving frequency and could take advantage of the platform to get more chances to improve wealth. It was created for risk-tolerant investors to earn capital gains and interest on the collective performance of their investment portfolio within a minimum of 6 months.

TAJBank Earns Highest Credit Ratings in NIB Sub-sector

Stories by Omolabake Fasogbon

TAJ Bank Limited, Nigeria's leading non-interest banking services provider, has again set a record with Bbb+ rating by the foremost rating agency - Agusto & Co -, thereby making the fast-growing non-interest lender the best rated in the nation's Non-Interest Banking (NIB) space.

The latest rating, which was a notch up from the Bank's previous rating, comes in recognition of the bank's high quality balance sheet and robust earnings capacity.

The lender clinched the rating of Bbb last year despite the prevailing economic situation, but this year took its operational efficiency and best practice principles higher to Bbb+, which industry analysts attributed to bank's zeal and strong performance rendering its innovative products and services to its growing customer base.

Commenting on the improved rating of the bank by the rating agency, the Founder/CEO of the fastest growing and value-driven non-interest lender, Mr. Hamid Joda, described it as a clear demonstration that TAJBank had continued to prioritise necessary risk management and operational controls, with clear focus on quality processes related to first class standards, management, and administration lifecycle.

Bond Hair Re-enters Nigeria's N457bn Market

Beauty brand, Bond Hair has announced a re-launch into Nigeria's booming hair care sector with varied collections to suit individual's needs and taste.

Founder of the company, Itoro Okopide, recently announced the re-launch at a press conference in Lagos, stressing her intentions to transform the market and improve customer's experience and relationship with their hair.

She said the organisation was setting out with artistic, bold designs and styles, typical of Nigerian women, adding that her products are of unmatched quality sourced directly from India.

She described Nigeria as a fertile destination for hair investors, given the strength of its youthful population and specifically, growing female population.

She however decried the influx of scammers and fake vendors in the business, which to her fuels negative reviews, experiences and distrust.

According to her, "Overtime, Nigerian women have had trust issues with hair vendors as a result of the not too pleasant experience they've had with them.

FoodCo Expands Footprint in Ibadan, Unveils Store

Omni-channel retailer, FoodCo has announced the opening of its 21st store in Gbagi, Ibadan in a significant expansion move.

The new store would be Foodco's third outlet launched in the course of 2023.

Speaking on the expansion, the company's Head of Innovation, Growth and Business Transformation, Funmi Aiyepeku, stated that the expansion was aimed at bridging gap in modern retail and meet demands of growing population in Ibadan.

"Statistics puts the Ibadan metro area population at almost 4million which is a 3.1 per cent increase from last year. Accordingly, it is incumbent on stakeholders like us to scale operations to meet the demand for modern retail among the growing population.

"We recognise that the modern shopper is dynamic in their taste and preferences. Consequently, our new store boasts a modern design and wide variety of high-quality products at competitive prices, all guaranteed to offer an enhanced shopping experience for our customers," she added.

The firm also seized the occasion to announce its annual Christmas promo which kicked off December 13.

On this, Aiyepeku stated that customers would enjoy special discounts on a selection of products across groceries, household items, toiletries and cosmetics, among others.

Bluetti Bridges Electricity Gap in Rural School

Market leader in energy storage, Bluetti, has extended electricity access to Oke Odan Baptist Primary School located in the rural community of Ogun State.

The gesture which was part of Bluetti's lighting an African Family (LAAF) project, saw the school receive 20 solar system kits to aid learning and address Power challenge.

LAAF is an initiative designed to provide clean energy to African household and bridge electricity gap in rural communities.

The presentation ceremony graced by key members of the community, including the traditional ruler witnessed live demonstrations of the usage and functionalities of the power stations.

Moreso, the gesture was also extended to selected outstanding students of the school who got a solar device each.

One Wellness Hosts Brunch, Facility Tour for Clients

One Wellness Center has hosted women to an exclusive brunch and a tour of its facility as part of efforts to smoothen business relationship.

A specialist at the center, Dr. Jean Nassar, stated that the move was necessary to strengthen acquaintance with the center and to improve its services and delivery too.

He added that the exercise was part of the center's commitment to providing a comprehensive range of healthcare services under one roof, while adhering strictly to standards in practice.

With the engagement, the center was able to showcase its facilities, while client also had the opportunity to relate and have a hands-on experience of the advanced technology and equipment Integrated into the center's service.

Commenting further, Nassar said, "We are thrilled to have hosted this exclusive brunch and tour event, providing a glimpse into the innovative and compassionate services we offer at One Wellness Center.

CWAY Brand Manager Listed among Top 35 Young Players in Marketing

CWAY's Brand and Marketing Manager, Tope Sule, has been honoured as one of the exceptional Top 35 marketing professionals under the age of 35 in the country.

Sule, was recognised at the annual BrandComm Awards organised by Brand Communicator in Lagos, recently.

The award initiative was aimed at rewarding the efforts of professionals who have been upholding the standards of marketing.

Sule who is also a faculty member and trainer at Orange Academy, was specially commended for a well -played role in the development of marketing communications field.

A statement by the organisers described him as a professional of indelible marks and impact.

SUPER SATURDAY

Victoria Inyama

I Won't Advise Any Woman to Give Up Her Life, Career for Family

Years after she fortuitously left the glitz world of entertainment and relocated abroad, to devote time to raising family; seasoned Nollywood actress, Victoria Inyama almost lost her fame and name to vicissitudes of life. The mother of three recently spoke to **Ferdinand Ekechukwu**, revealing her beautifully new status, fortune and plans moving on

You were one of the celebrity models at the last Black History & Lifestyle Award in London. Can you share your experience with us?

It was a very interesting experience. I loved it; I loved every minute of it because a friend of mine, while she was in Nigeria asked me if I would want to take part and model for one of the organisers which is House of Sota. I said yeah, why not. So, they got me beautifully embroidered Kaftan to wear and I attended the fashion show. Funny enough, that's my very first time of attending a fashion show in the UK and I have been here for like 20years! Because my first son is 18 (laughing). I have never been to a fashion show. I used to attend fashion shows in Nigeria, I used to be a model, I used to do the catwalk then in Silverbird. But that was many years ago. It was a lovely experience having to do the catwalk with the Kaftan attire. It was very memorable I will never forget it.

How has it been like living in London compared with living in Nigeria where you made name acting?

Of course, living in London is so different. There's no basis for the comparison if you know what I mean. I was very young, no kids in Nigeria. I was just doing my thing. Coming to the UK was like I came as a married woman and obviously I could live my life the way I wanted to. And then children came along. I'm that kind of a person that I believe in family. So, I had to put everything aside to just focus on family. I don't know if I'm going to advice somebody to do that now. With hindsight, I would have also focused on myself whilst doing family. It would have been a bit tricky, but its better because when you give your all and you make all the sacrifices and the person you are making it for does not appreciate, then it's a bit wonky; it's a bit difficult you know. So, I loved the fact that I stayed home to take care of my children and raised all of them myself. Like they didn't go to nursery until they were like 3 or 4years old. So, when I look back, I thank God for that opportunity that I did everything myself. And unfortunately, the marriage didn't work out due to domestic violence. I say that. And I'm still here and hopefully, I do use most of my experiences to support other people and I'm going to continue to do that. But there's no comparison. So, UK is okay if you have a focus, you have a dream, you can actually realise it here. I think you can do the same in Nigeria as well. I can't really compare because I love both places and I'm so blessed I can still live in the two world even as at today or tomorrow.

Despite the fame and glitz you seemed to have enjoyed in Nigeria, why did you relocate to the United Kingdom?

Well, I am a traditional person; I was raised by a traditional person, my late grandma. And in the village you know how it is after your education you have to get married, you have to get children. It wasn't like after your education you need to get a job, no. So, after I started acting and then I went to university, as I graduated and decided to get married, the guy was based abroad. My dad was abroad, so I used to come visit my dad then. So I decided 'okay time to relocate'. Because I just love family, I can't say it enough. Unfortunately, it didn't end the way I wanted it or it didn't go the way I wanted...even If I'm getting married again, it's not like I'm going to have kids again. It's just going to be for lovely companionship.

You were recently reported to have made a 'comeback' to acting in the movie Golden Stripes. What did you mean by: "Life showed up, I gave it all up"

Yes, I did a movie. It was a very small role. But I just wanted to do it to see if I was still in love with acting. And I totally loved it. I'm still in love with acting. I am going to come back into acting. I never left anyway. It was just children and keeping very busy. I never really left. But now, yes I am looking forward to like if there are any good productions, with good directors. Good producers. Because one thing I'm not doing, I'm not acting for entertainment. I'm just going to be acting for value and worth. I want people to see my movie and say 'oh I can relate to that'. I want to do movies to teach a lesson or to lend a situation whereby my character is going to teach you something.

And I said "life showed up" yea life showed up…kids, husband, family, and I gave it all up". Like I said, I don't think I would do that again. And I don't think I would advise any woman to give up her life, her career, her dream, her passion for family. Blend it together if you can. But don't give it up. Because your value as a person and the respect you deserve you are giving that away. At the end of the day, the man would think you are a loser and you are there to take, take, take and eat, eat, eat and not support. And even though in my case I was supportive, we were building a company together. We built a property company together where we buy and sell properties, but as it is now, it is in contention. It was as if I never did anything. Meanwhile, I even coined the name of the company. I used my name, my son's name, his (ex-husband) daughter's name from a previous marriage. I put everything together and we formed a company. But you know when you are dealing with a very narcissistic person, everything just kind of disappear. It's as if I never existed in the company arena with him but that's okay.

Before this 'comeback' moment, what were you engaged with in the UK?

Okay before the movie, when my marriage ended in 2013, I kind of struggled a bit with three children going to live in the refugee because the police removed us from the property. It wasn't conducive at all. But by 2016, I went back to university. I did Psycho-social studies which is Psychology and Social Studies, finished in 2019. And then



Inyama

SUPER SATURDAY

I Won't Advise Any Woman to Give Up Her Life, Career for Family

Covid came and I became ill and prior to that time, I had started my divorce. Because it was clear the marriage had ended, broken down and I started the divorce which I'm still doing till today. Because let me use this example; when a slave wants to go free, you know the slave master is going to do everything to fight and make sure that slave just doesn't leave. That's how my marriage was. He didn't want me to go and didn't want to do the necessary things you know. I started the divorce. I know how long it even took me to get him to sign the divorce papers. He had to be tricked into signing the divorce papers. Obviously, both of us started the property company, so there's a lot of logistics we had to go through with the company. In between that he's trying to sell of the houses, pocket the money. Thank God for a country where there is law. So, I found out about that and had to stop that quickly. Because all through this while, I was thinking 'okay you know what, let's share how we are going to be staying with the kids so you can have a life and I can have a life' because I have never really had a life since I came to the UK. It's been marriage, kids, family and all that. So, I was hoping and praying that he would want to take the kids and have the kids, but no! The few times the kids will be with me he wouldn't take care of them. It got to a stage the children did not want to go to him. They just wouldn't want to go to him. He wasn't the father. His own fatherhood was more for to show off and make him look good in the public. So, I took him to court for us to have shared custody. But he knew what he did that made the judge to decide that he's not having the kids. And obviously the kids did not want to stay with him. Again I had to struggle with going to university, the kids. I finished, now got back to work. Stopping work, divorce, custody, it's just been crazy. Now I'm back to school I have not finished yet. So when I finish I'm going to say what I went back to school to do and all that. I'm back into education again and hopefully, after this I will call it a day. So, yes I have been very busy but most especially I have been busy trying to get myself out of a toxic marriage. Next year is 2024, I separated 2014. So it has taken me 10 years to cut off from a toxic and manipulative person, a manipulative relationship. It's taken me that long. It's not over but hopefully next year it's going to be over. So, I have been busy basically apart from achieving other things for myself, living and God has been blessing me. So, it's taken me 10 years just to be a whole person again.



Inyama

You did remarkably well in your early acting days and you were among the lead actresses. Can you recall some of those moments?

Oh my God! I had loads of lovely moments in my movies. I did Glamour Boys with Jeta Amata, it was beautiful. I loved it especially the fashion scene, I think we were clothed by Collectibles. You know we will go to Collectibles and take what we wanted to wear; and the body was there, the shape was there, it was nice to dress well and look good. I did Love From Above with Jim Iyke, Aunty Sola Sobowale, Uncle Pete Edochie, I have done so many remarkable movies and each of my movies I have thoroughly enjoyed because of the people I was acting with. I guess because of my shape, I was always acting the spoilt girl, the bad girl, and stuff like that. I missed those days and yes I had loads and loads of beautiful times.

What attracted you to acting in the first place?

You know what? I didn't even know what I was doing. It's not like I woke up and said I wanted to be an actress. Those days we didn't have social media, there was just nothing! The only thing that made me want to act was, 'okay I used to watch Mirror in The Sun or Behind The Cloud, I can't remember now.' There's one actress, it was Barbara Soki that really made me go into acting. She was so beautiful and still is. And I used to say 'oh my God I would love to meet this person.' Just like a typical child we all had dreams. 'Oh I want to be a big star', 'want to sing, want to dance', 'want to act and stuff like that'. And God just blessed me and gave me the opportunity through our neighbours uncle Talab Abass and I took it and Zik Okafor supported me and there we are today. And we continued. But I have been someone that always loved education. So at some point I had to stop for a bit I went to University of Lagos. I went to do Creative Art which is Theatre Arts. There was really no attraction. We didn't know what we were doing. A lot of us that started then we didn't know it will get to this stage. And that's why sometimes I'm like 'wow I started this thing and not now there's more money than before, there's more fame than before'. So, many things and you know what, I can't wait to come back and get my own share if I have to put it that way I have not really enjoyed anything from this acting.

Of all the roles you played, which easily comes to mind and in what movie?

'Odum', I played the role of Agbonma with Uncle Sam Dede. It was in the village. And I think we lost an actor in that movie. There was this river we were really not supposed to go into or something like that, I can't really remember the whole story now but the actor went into the river I think he drowned. It's one of the movies I can't forget

What are your most profound motherhood lessons?

Ha! (laughs)… I don't even know where to start with this. I have an 18-year-old son, I have a 15-year-old daughter and I have an 11-year-old son. Just like pregnancy there's no manual. Motherhood there's no manual. It's all based on negotiation you have to negotiate with the child, mediation between the children, love, communication; I'm still talking till tomorrow. You still talk and you pray that even if they are not listening now, at some point in their lives they will. Be honest to the children. I also believe in being a role model to your children. So, there's a certain kind of lifestyle you would not want your child to have; you try not to live that lifestyle. It's all sacrifices. The day you decide to get pregnant to have a child is the day you deciding that I'm going to make so much sacrifices for this child. Everything that you have been through that you don't want you make sure you safeguard your child from it.

What would you say are your low and high moments in life?

I think when I was ill, when I had cancer I think that was my low moment for me. I would say I have had more high moments because I'm someone I know how to turn certain situations around; it's all in my mindset. So, I think for me the low moment was when I was ill. Then I became well. I have been cancer free now for many years. High moments; every day is a high moment you know. Every day I wake up I'm able to take care of myself, I'm able to take care of my children, I'm grateful for the little things.

Besides acting, what other talent do you possess; singing, dancing?

I can sing and I love to dance. Dance for me is therapy. And because I'm in psychology, I have noticed I'm blessed to be a healer. Based on lived experiences of so many things that I have been through, most time when I tell people or when I tell somebody or when I'm supporting somebody in a therapeutic capacity about a situation about life, the person always comes out on the other side better, happier. So, I'm really grateful that I have that capacity to help, to heal, to support someone else both from what I have learned academically and from a gift that I have. And I feel that's more than singing and dancing.

POLITY

Olabanji: How I Switched from Accountancy to Photography

Mr. Korede Olabanji, popularly called Photonimi, a highly sought-after photographer with over 21 years experience, who has worked for high-net-worth individuals and corporate organisations shares how he left his job as a chartered accountant in 2002 to start a career in a relatively unfamiliar terrain. He equally shared how he has evolved with several technological changes and the 'Project Nigeria Tribe'. **Oluchi Chibuzor** presents the excerpts:

Can you tell us about background and how you started?

I started photography as a hobby. Even while I was still in the corporate world, I loved and was known for taking pictures and creating beautiful memories of workplace events for free. I didn't think of commercialising my passion and skill for photography until 2002, when I began to see a future in it. Photography has several niches but I chose events and this was because back in those days of film photography, so many photographers disappointed their clients, leaving them sad and furious. I understood the frustration that comes with such disappointments better after the photographer who covered my direct elder brother's child's naming ceremony returned a few days after the event to tell him that he would not get images from the ceremony because chemicals burnt the film in a dark room. So, forever my brother did not have his first child's naming ceremony pictures. I saw this photographer-disappointing-clients scenario a few times and it stirred up a desire in me to bridge that gap. I said to myself, 'Be the catalyst'and that led me into events photography.

I qualified as an associate accountant in 1997 after which I became a fellow of ICAN in 2008. In 2007, I resigned from my employment (at Conoil Producing), set up my studio, and became a full-time photographer. Ever since then, I resolved that as a brand, I will always strive for excellence in service delivery that makes customers happy for life. I can tell you that I still have a client who has been engaging my services since the inception of the brand in 2002, till today. I take pictures of every member of the family. This is why I don't joke with excellence. I believe every one of my clients deserve the best so I always give it to them even if I have to go the extra mile. And thankfully, this commitment has earned us a good number of loyal customers, many of which have taken me as part of their family. So, excellence is a major key. Another factor that has helped so far is my commitment to continuous and endless personal and professional development. I never stop growing because for me, I believe as far as improvement is concerned you can never get to the end of it. There



Olabanji

is no destination or utmost height on the journey towards growth so you keep improving. I believe in continuous and never-ending improvement, especially consistency in upholding my values. Humility is another indispensable key. I try to be humble because humility is the way to reach the top in life. I don't let my achievements or the commendations and praises of my clients get into my head. I always remind myself that I am a man helped by God so there's nothing I should boast of. I remain humble so that God can continue to lift me because He only lifts the humble.

As you celebrate your 21st anniversary, what are those legacies that would capture your footprint in the sector and beyond?

This year is our 21st year in this business and it is also very interesting that in our 21st year, I won event photography of the year. By God's grace, we won the Events Photography of the Year organised by the Association of Professional Party Organisers and Event Managers of Nigeria (APPOEM). It is an honour I greatly appreciate. I believe it's a dividend of the many years of staying consistent with our values of integrity, excellence, competence, and customer satisfaction as a brand. Beyond that, it is a motivator for us to do more. Photography in Nigeria and globally has gone through several phases; from the manual phase to the glorified manual phase, to semi-digital, and then to the digital phase. Now, we are in the mirror-less age. If there is anything I know that is constant in life, it is change. What I have discovered however is that change has a twin brother that it moves together with which is adaptation. Every time change happens in my field, I quickly adapt to it and this has continued to equip me with the competence required to remain relevant in each passing phase. Let me tell you, the photography industry is probably the most volatile industry I know because technology affects its directly. Whenever a new camera is produced, it comes with several additions that make it different from and better than what already exists and you have to improve your skill to catch up with the change. If a new software is launched, you have to probably upgrade your laptop or system to be able to use it. All these things come with a cost, and so in the industry, you have to be ready for a change that can hit the industry at any time. Having realised this, I invest in my continuous growth and consistent delivery of excellent jobs for clients. I do not allow any improvement or growth to elude me and I think this is one of the reasons why so many people always look at me. This man has been there for 21 years and they wonder how. I will say grace, adaptability to whatever is coming, preparedness to grow, and to embrace whatever comes my way along the line in the industry.

Having seen it at all as it were, is there any social impact program that you are engaged in?

I used to train photographers, which was something I enjoyed doing but after a while, I began to struggle with my time due to my busy schedule. So, what I do now is to counsel and consult with start-ups and already established photography brands – personal and corporate. If you already know what you are doing and just want some understanding from me (like how to sustain your business and what to do in this kind of environment), I offer my counsel, but not to train someone.

During COVID-19, - a pandemic that shut down the event center industry - God helped us greatly by giving us a foresight that made us upgrade our studio just before the lockdown. During that period, the studio sustained us.



L-R: Guest Speaker and Fellowship awardee, General Manager and Executive of the Internal Audit and Forensic Services Division at MTN Nigeria, Ibe Kalu; Fellowship awardee, Dr David Isiavwe; Chairperson, Information Technology Committee, Abigail Duopoma; President, Compliance Institute, Nigeria, Pattison Boleigha; Chairman, Research Committee, Taiwo Sanusi; and Chairman Audit Committee, Mr Rotimi Omotayo at 2023 CIN Induction and investiture ceremony held in Lagos….recently



L- R: Lagos State Commissioner for Agriculture, Ms Abisola Olusanya; Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture, Hon. Emmanuel Olootu; Lagos State Deputy Governor. Dr. Obafemi Hamzat; Chef Gibbs, Gbolabo Adebakin; and Secretary to the state government, Abimbola Salu Hundeyin, during 2023 Lagos Food Festival held at Muri Okunola Park in Lagos recently....SUNDAY ADIGUN



L-R; Nollywood actress, Michelle Dede; Uche Jombo; Rita Dominic; Ini Edo; and Nse Ikpe-Etim; at the Love and Life Private Screening in Lagos. .....recently



L-R: The Registrar of Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Mr. Dapo Adeniyi; The Pro-chancellor, Professor Olaseikan Alade Fakuloju; Wife of the Chancellor, Mrs. Folake Adegbulugbe; The Chancellor, Prof Anthony Adegbulugbe; The Pro chancellor Prof Joash ojo Amuptan (SAN); and the visitor to the university and President CAC Nigeria and overseas Pastor S.O Oladele during the installation of Professor Anthony Adegbulugbe as chancellor of Ayo Babalola at University Campus, Ara-Ikeji,Osun State ..recently

EXPRESSION

'Harassment' Uncountable



MEDIAGAFFES BY EBERE WABARA

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"OIL, gas service providers exiting Nigeria in droves, IPPG raise (raises) the alarm" For elucidation: IPPG represents the Independent Petroleum Producers Group.

"…will complete critical infrastructure (infrastructural) projects that will stimulate economic growth and improve the living standard of Nigerians." Please note: 'infrastructure,' by all ramifications, is a noun and cannot function—in any circumstance—as an adjective! The adjectival form is 'infrastructural.' This is basic and should not be a challenge even to a kindergartner, let alone an Editorial Board of a frontline newspaper!

"May her gentle soul rest in the bossom of the Lord Amen." A rewrite: May her gentle soul rest in the Lord's bosom (note the spelling and the next full-stop). Amen.

THE NATION ON SUNDAY of October 1 circulated numerous poisoned slips starting from its front page: "KSB: I will marry again if…" Truth in defence of freedom: I will remarry if…

"Otti, who congratulated the new commissioner for (on/upon) the elevation…."

"The accident, which occurred around (about) 6.30am (6.30 a.m.), was the worst in the locality in a decade." 'Around' in timing is sheer Americanism!

"Fifteen of the youth died while several of them have (had) fractures and are (were) being attended to at government (the government) hospital in the…."

"Sources said the deceased might be given mass burial since they are (were) from the same village."

"May God continue to bless you, give you wisdom and good health beyond measures (measure)."

Finally, THE NATION ON SUNDAY of November 5: "The era of harassments from NYDC, a federal agency, has finally been put paid to by that landmark judgment." 'Harassment,' unlike 'embarrassment,' is uncountable.

THISDAY front and inside pages of August 10 indulged in grammatical crudity trebly: Window headline: "Nigerian crude oil exports to hit 1.94m bpd in September" The intro: "Nigeria's crude Oil (sic—abuse of capital letter) export, excluding condensates (another comma) will hit 1.94 million barrels per day by September…." The Saturday Newspaper: 'by September' implies, possibly, August, September or October, while the headline says 'in September'! So, which is the correct version: by or in…?

"THISDAY gathered (just tell readers what the medium 'gathered'!) that the victims—six of them—were abducted by the gunmen at about 7.00am (7.00 a.m.) on their way to work…." Can publications ever be specific on time? Either: at or about a particular time. 'At' and 'about' cannot function in the same environment—except in informal entries: at or about 7 a.m.

"Bayelsa govt invests N1.17bn on (in) aquaculture farms"

"…he explained that attacks by Boko Haram on churches is (why?) not a vendetta against Christians, but a political tool."

Lastly from THISDAY COVER under review: "We should be very careful because many of the people who are now jumping into the APC bandwagon are ex-PDP members." Between APC and PDP: climb/jump/get on (not into) the bandwagon. Or, worse still: 'join the bandwagon'!

"We have a lot of youths, millions of them, that are yet be (yet to be) attended to in the Niger Delta."

"Governor Fubara of Rivers State must brace up for more trouble from the opposition in the days and months ahead…." (Contributed by Charles Okogene) The embattled governor must brace for—not 'brace up for'!

"They died when the vehicle they were travelling in somersaulted after the front tyre bursted (burst)." Past tense and past participle: burst

"The governor noted that their deaths (death) has again brought to the front burner…."

Finally from THE NATION ON SUNDAY under review: "That message need (needs) to be avoided…."

Next is THISDAY of August 3, also beginning from its front page: "…suspected to be member (a member) of the terrorist organization (organization, preferably), al-Qaeda."

"To download (a comma) visit your favourite app store" and "for more information (a comma, again!) log on to…."

"Many African countries like Sierra Leone are looking up to Nigeria for a bale out (sic)…." Commentary: bailout

"Abia and armed-chair critics" Insight: arm-chair critics

"For Mrs. Obioma Imoke, it's another feather to her cap" A rewrite: For Obioma Imoke, it's a feather in her cap

"…they are coming with much more (many more) new aircrafts (aircraft) and state of the art (state-of-the-art) private aircraft…."

"Born same (the same) day to same (the same) parents…."

"The strike action definitely will compound the security situation in the country." Remove 'action' in the interest of scholarship.

"Nigerian universities have continued to go down in rating with its (there) antiquated and obsolete scientific equipments…." 'Equipment,' like 'stationery' and 'cutlery,' is non-count.

"…held recently at (on) the institution's main campus served many purposes."

"…you always want those type of players in your team." Sport journalism: this type of players or those types of players—depending on context.

"AMC has set up series (a series) of activities…."

"…a major setback for (to) marketing practice in (on) the continent."

"Astymin brilliance reward: Sustaining long term equity" Brands & Marketing: long-term equity

"Navy arrests oil bunkering syndicate" Community Mirror: oil-bunkering syndicate

"Forum calls for co existence (co-existence) in Ondo"

"…whereas European leagues are getting set to kick-off for 2023/2024 season." Phrasal verbs do not admit hyphenation. Insight: kick off.

Finally from the Back Page of Daily Trust of November 25 comes the last set of gaffes: "Majority (A majority) of the reported 5,000 Nigerians who…."

"The WHO said that approximately 15 million people worldwide have (had) active tuberculosis."

"…people drink from streams due to the absence of portable (potable) water."

"…deep thought and practical wisdom which more matured (mature) people are more amendable (amenable) to."

"As this year's World Population Day was being commemorated at (in) Abuja, the Minister of Health alerted the nation about (to) the spate of teenage pregnancies."

"…Nigeria is considerably significant to enter into direct contact with makers of vaccines with a view to negotiate (negotiating) favourable (a favourable) cost and a more efficient delivery mechanism."

"With gratitude to God for a life well spent, the entire management and members of staff of…sends (send) her (their) condolence (condolences) to the family of our chairman…."

"We are leaking in various holes towards various leanings and we still are lacking in leadership that has any model to solve our miriad (myriad) of problems."

"…development media practitioner (professional)…."

"In the eyes and reckoning of every Imo citizens, there has only been two administrations in the state." Every Imo citizen or all Imo citizens…and this: there have (not has) only been two administrations in the state.

"NPA commends FG over (for) port reforms"

"Nigeria's aviation industry witnessed some changes during the administration of late Musa Umar Yar'dua…." This way: the administration of the late….

"After four years of solid performance on the saddle…." Let God's will be done: in the saddle.

"Some states have seized the opportunity to make waves…." It is only in America and Nigeria that opportunities are seized. In New (Formal/Standard) English environments, you either use or take opportunities. 'Seize' inseparably involves the use of some measure of force or deployment of violence.

"Gowon, others pay last respect to…." No news: last respects.

"It is perhaps in this light that the series of consultative meeting…" Folk (popular) etymology: the series of consultative meetings.

Reminiscences: Hazards of Our Job



COUNTERPOINT

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Arguably, every job has its peculiar attendant hazards that may or may not impair its success or effectiveness. In Nigerian entertainment journalism, of the 80s and 90s, there were man-made bottlenecks and such notorious impediments waylaying the reporters in their efforts to get at the 'meat' and bare bones of emergent stories - beyond platitudes served by promotions men of record companies or some professional spin doctors.

In these reminiscences, we shall dig back to some of the "iconic" incidents that struck lingering chords in one's memories. Let's start with the piece I once titled 'Shina Peters' Alarming Humility': "Another noteworthy incident while I was in the Punch happened sometime in 1989. Jude Arijaje arrived at Punch as a proof reader in the same year. He was friendly and appeared to like the funcity lifestyle… so, we got along well. He was close to the children of the venerated jurist, Justice Akinola Aguda - Bola and Muyiwa. On a few occasions, I hung out with them...it was a rollicking fun time. From as early as 1989, Jude would regale me with their latest trysts at one fun spot or the other. The most prominent in his narratives was some sensational music and partying going on at the Stadium Hotel. "Aaagh… Ooounfo... Wale nfooo…", and similar ditties, were a constant refrain when Jude was with me in the office. It seemed nonsensical to me… and when added to the fact that it was supposedly by Shina Peters, I reckoned it was one elaborate prank that the former guitar prodigy was concocting to hoodwink impressionable young minds.

One day, I resolved to go and see what was "flying" at the Stadium Hotel. It was not my usual hangouts as I considered it outdated, and therefore open to the roughnecks of the notorious neighborhoods of Shitta, Mushin, Ojuelegba, Idi-Oro, Iponri, Fadeyi, Shomolu - all those places could be deadly and unpredictable at nights. Stadium Hotel was owned by Highlife great, Dr. Victor Olaiya, and was close to the National Stadium, from where it derived its name. On that fateful day, we stormed the Stadium Hotel. Entry, I believe, was free so far you could get a table, and buy drinks. If well disposed, and your pockets were compliant, you could order pepper-soup, or some other 'barbecued' snacks.

The music was electric and staccato in rhythm...pulsating and rapid in pace...sweat-inducing and infectious even when you insisted on not jumping on the dance floor. As a rule, I wouldn't go dancing or partying when on duty, but it was pretty difficult to keep still, and unmoved when this fellow, and his young and boisterous group were pounding the night with suggestive and mostly slangy lyrics. And lo and behold, it was Shina Peters. I was mesmerised... to the grinning satisfaction of others who had listened to my croaking all weekend that their so-called music magician might be an exaggerated scam, or some overcooked 'buffet'.

When the band took a break around 4am, I supposed, I made an effort to get close to the band leader, and have a short interview. I was quite impressed. And I wanted to get a couple of quotes...in breaking what I believed would be a career-defining story. It was a mistake. I was roughly cut off from getting to him, and pushed off the performance area. Shina didn't appear to notice what was going on. I don't remember if my friends tried to challenge the affront. Usually, the name of The Punch, or a flash of my ID card was sufficient to gain access in most entertainment spots, since I operated incognito then. But not those Stadium Hotel bouncers, whom I suspect were drafted from the nearby weightlifting gym, and were itching to flex their muscles, and lift trouble-makers as bar-bells... to throw onto the hard streets of Surulere. They didn't care who I was, or what I came for. Before they could get mad enough to fling me out, I ducked out of the hotel.

I believe it was a Wednesday...and my production was on Thursday. On my desk, and in the flow of work, I crafted a fairly long story about the soon to explode sensational music being cooked out of the Stadium Hotel… how Shina Peters, like a Phoenix, was discarding his old skin, and emerging with new music, a new repertoire, and with his obvious audience being the young and upwardly mobile... blah, blah, blah. It was a highly positive and enthusiastic story.

Then, in my gossip column, I lambasted the poor mentality of the security personnel, the attempt to disgrace me while on duty, and generally abused the living daylights out of those muscle-brained chumps. I also flogged whoever employed them thoroughly.

It was a quiet weekend. And life went on smoothly. On the first working day: guess who was at the Features department to say 'who wrote that story?' I was quite familiar with people who asked that question (with "nonsense boy" planted somewhere in the middle). I had angry artistes threatening to 'deal' with me, or set up shop to 'yap' me in the office, at events, or when visiting them - mostly for what I wrote either in the 'gist column', or in my usually blunt reviews of music.

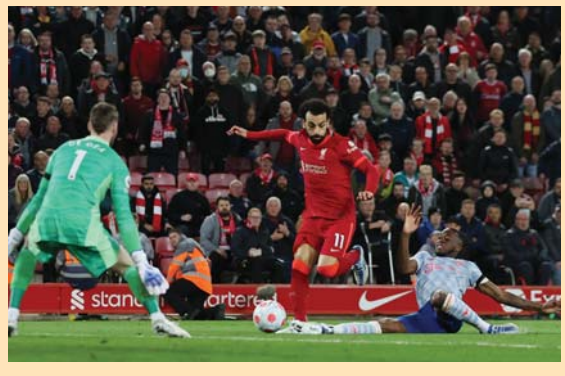
That day, Shina embarrassed me when he prostrated to beg me for the harassment I received a few days earlier at his show. I was stunned. Though he was not the superstar of the one or two years later, he was quite a handful of years older than I... almost three and a half years. The dandy looking fellow, garbed in fine, shiny apparels most artistes find inevitably compulsory to wear, did it once and again, even as I struggled, in consternation, to prevent him from embarrassing me any further. Why all that? I asked.

His response was simple, and understandable - which I had taken for granted. He said he had been in the media since he was eight or so years old, and had been burnt many times, even for things he hadn't done...but that despite the treatment meted to me, as stated in the gossip strip, that I could still write what he felt was a magnificent story about his new music, and all the unbelievably nice things I predicted for him...he was overwhelmed with contrition, and had to come thank me for not being influenced by the unfortunate misunderstanding.

I just laughed - and assured him that whatever one suffered in the line of reporting a situation or subject, especially if not directly related to, or instigated by that source, should not, in any way, tint or colour the reporter's treatment of the story. The reporter - and this also goes for anyone involved in independent and supposedly dispassionate observation of situations, scenarios or individuals... the reporting vessels should as much as humanly possible restrict himself or herself to the narrow margins of the particular assignments ahead of you. Avoid embellishments and 'jara' to sweeten or make 'enjoyable' the reading of what should be actual, real and ungarnished.

(To Continue)

GLOBAL SOCCER



SUSTAINING TOP SPOT

PAGE. 28

A THISDAY WEEKLY PULL-OUT

16.12.2023

Victor Osimhen Dream Come True

GLOBAL SOCCER



Osimhen and Asisat Oshoala

Victor Osimhen Dream Come True

Growing up in a tough environment and raised by his father with little support from his brother, Andrew, Victor Osimhen sold sachet water and snacks in Lagos traffic and worked in construction sites carrying mixed concrete on his head near his home to make ends meet. He always loved and knew football was his only way of breaking away from poverty and picked his first pair of soccer boots from a dumpsite. Little wonder, the first statement that came out of his mouth when he was crowned the African Footballer of the Year in Marrakech *, Morocco on Monday night was-"It's a dream come true for me"*

Victor Osimhen on Monday night in Marrakech, Morrocco, won the African Footballer of the Year Award, becoming the next Nigerian to achieve the feat after Kanu Nwankwo did in 1994.

The 24-year-old led Napoli to their first domestic title in 33 years and it therefore came as no surprise that the striker beat Egypt's Mohamed Salah and Morocco's Achraf Hakimi to the golden ball.

"It's a dream come true for me," Osimhen said after he was presented with the award.

"I appreciate Nigerians for their support. I appreciate Africa for putting me on the map, encouraging me and defending me, regardless of my shortcomings."

Osimhen grew up in poverty in Olusosun, a run-down neighborhood in Nigeria's commercial capital of Lagos. The pungent smell of the nearby landfill was a constant in the life of the young footballer, whose mother died when he was a young boy. As the youngest child, he was raised by his father and supported by his oldest brother, Andrew, who sold newspapers to help him achieve his dreams of playing football.

His first pair of football boots were picked from the Olusosun dumpsite, and he dreamed of playing among the elite like his idol, the Chelsea and Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba.

He sold satchet water and snacks in Lagos traffic and worked as a labourer carrying mixed concrete on his head at construction sites near his home. Poverty toughened him up.

"The place where I came from, nothing is promised," Osimhen said in a recent interview. "I am so happy about my breakthrough because nobody gave me a chance of making it out of the trenches. Not just me but my whole family. For me to work my way up, I have shown the kids there that when you work hard and you're focused, anything is possible with God."

Osimhen's breakthrough in football did not however materialise until former Nigeria U17 coach, Emmanuel Amuneke, who interestingly was a former African Footballer of the Year winner, gave him the chance to represent Nigeria at the 2015 U17 World Cup in Chile.

An excited Osimhen said in his speech on Monday night, "First of all, I want to say thank you God for everything, Special thanks go to Emmanuel Amuneke. Without him, I don't think I would be standing in front of you guys holding one of the most prestigious awards in world football. It's a dream come true for me"

"I think for Victor, probably because of the tough life that he spent when he was young, that helped him," said Amuneke.

"He's someone that wanted to succeed. Even when you look at him today with Napoli, he doesn't like to lose. He always wants to win, one quality that singles Victor out."

After his U17 exploit in Chile, major European clubs tried to sign him, he and his family opted for Wolfsburg because of the calm environment and the club's ability to develop young players. But a series of injuries limited him to 14 Bundesliga games without a goal before he was shipped off on loan to Charleroi in Belgium.

"Wolfsburg condemned him," his older brother Andrew told DW. "They said he was not fit, that he was not good. But Charleroi gave him that platform." Former Wolfsburg sporting director Jörg Schmadtke later admitted it was a "poor decision" when Osimhen joined Napoli from Lille for $64.8 million.

It was not until his third season in Naples, that Osimhen hit the peak of his powers to help crown Napoli Serie A champions for the first time since Diego Maradona led them to glory in 1987 and 1990.

"I think he was the most important element of that title challenge," Kristen Schlewitz, author of the book "More Than Maradona," told DW. "He has this graceful elegance that contradicts his reputation as a physical player."

Only Maradona is more revered than Osimhen in the city of Naples. Like the Argentine legend, the young Nigerian's face adorns murals across the city, where they worship their football stars like gods. Fans stand in front of his home every night singing his name. They hang around restaurants until the early hours for autographs. Their adulation matches his boisterous spirit.

"For a boy from Olusosun, who would have thought I would have my picture beside Maradona's," said Osimhen. "It's like a dream."

Osimhen became the highest African goalscorer of all time in Serie A following his decisive goal for Napoli against Florentina. The record was previously held by George Weah of Liberia, who, during his spell, scored 46 goals in the league.

The Napoli striker scored on the season's final day to reach 26 goals for the Serie A season, ensuring he won the Capocannoniere for the 2022/23 season as the league's top scorer. The first by an African player in the 125-year history.

The 24-year-old also joined Zlatan Ibrahimovic as the only two players to win both the golden boot and the Scudetto in the same season.

After winning the CAF Award, Osimhen returned to action for Napoli the following day, when they welcomed Braga to the Diego Armanado Maradona Stadium a was on the score sheet.

GLOBAL SOCCER

Liverpool Set to Consolidate Top Spot with Man Utd Visit

Struggling Manchester United travel to the home of bitter rivals, Liverpool, this weekend desperate to avoid another humiliation but with all the signs pointing to a tough afternoon at Anfield. The Red Devils left Merseyside last season with their tails between their legs after a 7-0 drubbing, are facing a Liverpool team top of the Premier League and brimful of confidence



Mo Salah scored twice in Liverpool's 7-0 demolition of Manchester United last season at Anfield

Forced to relive painful memories of last season's seven-goal slaughter, Manchester United make a short trip to Merseyside to face Liverpool in front of an anticipated record-breaking Anfield crowd on Sunday.

As many as 57,000 fans are expected to saunter through the turnstiles to witness this weekend's headline Premier League contest, where the two titans are both aiming to rectify some midweek mistakes.

Thanks to a successful test event on Monday, a portion of Liverpool's Anfield Road Stand will officially open for business on Sunday - a month earlier than expected - where the hosts are hoping to welcome their highest amount of spectators in the Premier League era and their most since the days of Bill Shankly in 1973.

Barring the Merseyside derby perhaps, the Liverpool powers-that-be could arguably not have wished for a more mouthwatering battle to break their spectator record - especially if recent results against Man United are anything to go by - and Jurgen Klopp's side head into Sunday's momentous occasion atop their Premier League perch.

Klopp and 12.30pm kickoffs are hardly a marriage made in heaven, and the midday misery appeared set to continue when Jean-Philippe Mateta sent Crystal Palace ahead from the penalty spot last weekend, but Mohamed Salah's 200th Reds goal and a fine Harvey Elliott winner saw Liverpool complete another trademark turnaround.

With Arsenal falling short against Aston Villa later in the day, Liverpool enter gameweek 17 with a one-point advantage over the Gunners and two-point cushion over the Lions - both of whom are in action at 2pm - so the Reds may have been bumped down to the bronze medal position by the time the first whistle blows at Anfield.

An experimental XI comprising fringe and academy players suffered a 2-1 Europa League loss to Union SG on Thursday, but that result paled into insignificance with a last-16 place already assured, and a seven-game Premier League winning run at home makes for incredibly pleasant reading for the Liverpool faithful, whose side have also scored at least twice in all of those triumphs.

Taking a leaf out of Liverpool's attacking book would not go amiss for their under-performing visitors, who also fell to a one-goal European defeat in midweek, albeit a much more disheartening one as they were booted out of the continental conversation entirely.

Even a win over Bayern Munich on the final matchday in Champions League Group A would have been rendered inconsequential by Copenhagen's beating of Galatasaray, but Erik ten Hag's troops fell short in their bid for Europa League salvation, succumbing to a Kingsley Coman strike to finish bottom of the pile.

With no European football on the calendar for the first half of 2024, Ten Hag will be blessed with ample time to reverse his side's horrendous domestic fortunes, as the downcast Red Devils were subjected to a cacophony of boos from fed up supporters in last weekend's humiliating 3-0 Old Trafford loss to Bournemouth.

As a result, Man United enter the weekend sat five places and 10 points worse off than Liverpool in the Premier League rankings, and the Red Devils have gone over two years without winning away against a team in the top eight of the table; the Ole Gunnar Solskjaer-masterminded 3-0 success over Tottenham Hotspur in October 2021 was their last such triumph.

A penny for both Solskjaer and Ten Hag's thoughts as Man United were blown to smithereens at Anfield in March, as Liverpool condemned the Red Devils to a 7-0 beatdown - the visitors' heaviest Premier League defeat ever - and not since 2016 have Man United come away from the Reds' turf with a Premier League win to shout about.

Head -to-Head

10/03/18	Man Utd 2-1 Liverpool
16/12/18	Liverpool 3-1 Man Utd
24/02/19	Man Utd v Liverpool
20/10/19	Man Utd 1-1 Liverpool
19/01/20	Liverpool 2-0 Man Utd
17/01/21	Liverpool 0-0 Man Utd
13/05/21	Man Utd 2-4 Liverpool
24/10/21	Man Utd 0-5 Liverpool
19/04/22	Liverpool 4-0 Man Und
22/08/22	Man Utd 2-1 Liverpool
05/03/23	Liverpool 7-0 Man Utd

Premier League Table

TEAM	P	GD	PTS
Liverpool	16	21	37
Arsenal	16	18	36
Aston Villa	16	15	35
Man City	16	20	33
Tottenham	16	10	30
Man Utd	16	-3	27
Newcastle	16	12	26
Brighton	16	5	26
West Ham	16	-4	24
Fulham	16	0	21
Brentford	16	1	19
Chelsea	16	0	19
Wolves	16	-5	19
Bournemouth	16	-9	19
Crystal Palace	16	-8	16
Nottm Forest	16	-11	14
Everton	16	0	13
Luton	16	-15	9
Burnley	16	-18	8
Sheff Utd	16	-29	8

PREMIER LEAGUE

TODAY

Bournemouth v Luton Town 15:00
Chelsea v Sheffield Utd 15:00
Man City v Crystal Palace 15:00
Newcastle v Fulham 15:00
Burnley v Everton 17:30

SUNDAY

Arsenal v Brighton 14:00
Brentford v Aston Villa 14:00
West Ham v Wolves 14:00

La Liga

TODAY

Celta Vigo v Granada 13:00
Athletic Bilbao v Atlético 15:15
Sevilla v Getafe 17:30
Valencia v Barcelona 20:00

SUNDAY

Almería v Mallorca 13:00
Sociedad v Real Betis 15:15
Las Palmas v Cádiz 17:30
Madrid v Villarreal 20:00

Hot Shot

PLAYERS	CLUB	GOALS
Erling Haaland	Man City	14
Mohamed Salah	Liverpool	11
Son Heung-min	Tottenham	10
Jarrod Bowen	West Ham	9
Hwang Hee-chan	Wolves	8
Dominic Solanke	Bournemouth	8
Ollie Watkins	Aston Villa	8
Callum Wilson	Newcastle	7
Bryan Mbeumo	Brentford	7
Alexander Isak	Newcastle	7

GLOBAL SOCCER



Basketball action

Webber Craves Basketball Played in Every Nigerian Neighbourhood

For an average Nigerian growing up whether in the city or the rural areas, two sports are always available to play with little or no help from adults and technology. These are the games of football and table tennis. Every corner of the home or street can be converted to a football pitch and football can be played with the original leather or rubber ball bought from the neighbourhood stores or one produced by the kids out of the combination of many soft items. As for table tennis, every table, every bench, or any smooth and clean corridor serves well

But Nigeria has produced a lot of great players in the biggest basketball leagues across the world and the biggest basketball competitions at the university levels and these have translated to having quality national teams. Despite the big mark the game has made for the country, it is not so available to Nigerians. Many of the good players bred in Nigeria started almost as teenagers. This is the story Opeyemi Babalola, better known as Webber wants to change.

The MD/Chief Executive Officer of Webber Engineering Nigeria says, "The one-day event we had (at the 1004 Estate, Victoria Island, Lagos) was to create huge fun and awareness for the young people and lovers of basketball around the islands and Lekki axis. We just wanted to fill in the space with a spectacular event. But this is just a part of what the goal is.

"The full plan is to make basketball courts available in any form at any neighbourhood in Lagos for a start. We can create the 3x3 court or full court depending on the space available and how you want it served. We started our production with just the upright but now we manufacture everything you need to host a standard basketball competition."

The idea did not come in 2023 but more than 10 years ago for the former basketball player with the Kwara Falcons.

He said, "Years back when I was in Angola I noticed they had a lot of basketball facilities in most corners of the city. And we all know how well the Angolans always perform in African basketball. I believe such accessibility would contribute one way or the other.

"When we got into the courts building and the allied equipment manufacturing, I figured out that we could get basketball going for competitions and entertainment like what we had in 1004 Estate. We have started and do hope that many individuals and corporate bodies can tap into this and make basketball available in every corner of the Nigerian city."

The 1004 Estate in Victoria Island, Lagos was kept bubbling from midday into the night in the Lagos 3x3 Slam Jam 2023 held on December 10th. It was an event put together by Webber Hoops and Courts in conjunction with Hoop Dreams Nigeria to bring the game to family doorsteps. They had sponsorship support from Pocari Sweat and Red Bull.

The competition had 16 teams competing for the total N500,000 prize money eventually won by the Kingsmen team powered by Abel Offiah ahead of White Fire. It was a super fun time as Webber converted the regular tennis court space into a lovely half-court for 3x3.

And that is the goal of Webber – converting any open space into a mobile basketball court.

"When we can have events everywhere, courts everywhere, we are then able to introduce more people into the game; we can generate more corporate sponsorship interest.

"We are touched by the goal of Giants of Africa (led by Masai Ujiri of the Toronto Raptors) to build 100 basketball courts across the continent of Africa. We are working with them to achieve this goal. If we all put in our little bits, the game will surely get to every doorstep in Nigeria."

Webber constructs the GOA basketball courts in Nigeria.

The basketball court, uprights, sitting facilities, and the other types of equipment used at the 1004 Estate event were manufactured by Webber Hoops. The company also provides services to other major clients across Nigeria.

Webber played basketball while studying engineering in school. He was not just on the court playing the game but also thinking creatively. Over time he had the conviction that he could produce a basketball upright from scratch. He did produce one. The first may not have come out as something manufactured in Dusseldorf or Detroit but he pushed on and today the art has been perfected and expanded to everything a modern basketball court needs.

1XBET Tournament'll be Bigger Next Year, Says Akanni

After the very successful inaugural edition of the 1XBET Community Grassroots Football Tournament in Lagos this year, the Initiator of the Competition, Waidi Akanni, is already looking ahead towards a bigger edition next year.

The former Super Eagles player in his postmortem of the maiden edition of the grassroots football tournament that involved all parts of Lagos State, stressed that the 2024 tournament will be bigger and expand to other parts of the South West region.

"Next year's final may not be in Lagos because we are getting more states from the South West to participate. We are starting gradually to expand it to the South West and very soon, we will cover the entire country in the near future," enthused the Match International Limited CEO.

While admitting that the 2023 edition was a huge success, he applauded all the teams that participated right from the zonal level till the final in which Bariga FC defeated Odion Ighalo FC 2-0 to lift the golden trophy.

"I must admit that the inaugural edition was a huge success. It went far beyond our imagination in terms of success recorded in planning and execution. My appreciation goes to all the participating clubs, members of the organising committee, stakeholders and the media, in particular, for putting up such a wonderful show," gushed Akanni who succeeded in attracting some of his ex international to every stage of the grassroots football tournament.

Akanni said the high level of enthusiasm demonstrated by the clubs has forced the organisers and sponsors 1XBET to expand the scope of the competition. "From the next edition, teams will be involved in playoffs before they can qualify to take part in the conferences. We wanted just 40 clubs but after the press conference, there was a deluge of entries. As a matter of fact, some of the late entries complained to our sponsors that we eliminated them unjustly, which was not true," the Chief Organiser revealed.

The month-long tournament kicked off on October with the final played at the magnificent pitch of the Mobolaji Johnson Arena at Onikan Waterfront on Lagos Island.

A full capacity crowd watched Bariga FC boys shock favorites Odion Ighalo FC to the maiden trophy. In the third place match, Young Strikers from Lagos Island back by their fans that took over all the stands, overcame De Elite FC from the Epe Conference to win the bronze.

One good news that will gladden the hearts of teams that will participate in the 2024 edition is the increase in the prize money for the winners.

"Our sponsors, 1XBET have agreed to increase the prize money for next year. Without letting out the cat from the bag, I can tell you that it will be almost three times more than what we paid out for this 2023 edition," concludes Akanni.



Abdulafeez Osoba defeated Ucheji back in May

Edun Gives Reason for Sponsoring National Table Tennis tourney

A United Kingdom-based Nigeria-born property expert and Founder of Daniel Ford International, Yemi Edun is venturing into table tennis, not as a player but as a financier of the first Daniel Ford International Elite Youth Championships taking place in Lagos on December 21 to 22. But Edun's interest in table tennis was borne out of his experience while growing up in the Surulere area of Lagos where the sport was popular among the residents particularly having watched the legendary exploits of former African and Commonwealth champion Atanda Musa in the early 1980s

For Edun, table tennis has always been part of him while growing up.

"Table tennis was widely played at homes and on the streets growing up, but I also lived in Surulere, which was and still is, to some extent, the sports capital of Nigeria. In fact, the National Stadium is also known as Sports City, and my growth in this section of the country made me acutely aware of all things sport, including table tennis. Aside from that, I grew up during a period when table tennis legends like Atanda Musa were routinely featured on the front pages of national newspapers," he expressed.

On why he is renewing his interest in table tennis now, Edun reacted thus: "Table tennis is an enormously accessible sport. A disused door and broken bits of wood were suitable entry points, with the balls fondly referred to as eggs by us back then due to their appearance and mild fragility.

However, the sport's accessibility and non-aggressive nature made it a family centered sport, which meant that most Nigerian households, regardless of class, had a tennis table in some form or another.

"So, with that said, there is a nostalgic look back to the glory days of table tennis, as well as an undying love and passion for the sport. We believe that the missing link or void is competition, and that is what we are attempting to bridge by introducing competition into the equation, which we believe will fan the flames that are still present and make it even better.

Asked if the support will be a long haul and not a one-off thing, he said,"If the anticipated passion and interest remains, we will consider making it even bigger and for a much longer period of time. In this scenario, the assistance would be long-term."

Edun is indeed expecting to provide opportunities for talent to shine from maiden edition of the tournament.

"The aim is to enrich the existing talent pool and provide opportunities for talent to shine. We also believe it would be something that is suitable for the festive season, a good way to round up the year.

Pomp as Molade Okoya-Thomas Cup Marks 55th Edition

Nigeria's oldest sports tournament, Molade Okoya-Thomas Table Tennis Cup marks its 55th edition this year as players across Lagos battle for trophies and prize money at the three-day tournament taking place at Teslim Balogun Stadium.

The tournament which has produced some of the country's finest table tennis stars including the legendary Atanda Musa started in 1968 by the late business mogul Molade Okoya-Thomas to mark his installation as the then Asoju Oba of Lagos.

This year's edition will kick off on Monday December 18 to 20 with players competing in the senior and junior divisions as the Lagos State Table Tennis Association (LSTTA) has promised to use the tournament to select its team for the 2024. Deji Okoya-Thomas said this year's marks another milestone celebration of the competition which has continued to churn out players for the country while pelding the commitment of the family to the annual staging of the championships.

"We want to continue to uphold the legacy of our late father, by ensuring that we mark every milestone edition with unique activities and for this year, we hope to make it distinct by ensuring that we reward the players and participants with good prizes. We are aware of the economic challenges across the country but in our usual style, we will stage the tournament in a low-key way hoping that it will fulfil the ideal of the founder of the competition," he said.

He added: "With the large turnout of players for a recent tournament in Lagos, we believe that more young players will again come through this tournament just like the likes of Olufunke Oshonaike, Bose Kaffo and a host of others have come through to become stars in Africa and the world. But we also lay emphasis on the education of the athletes because we want to follow the ideals of our father, we most times preached education with sports during his lifetime being a former athlete himself. We hope the best players will again emerge this year as we look forward to an exciting tournament."

GOtv Boxing Night 30: 'I'll Beat Ucheji Again', Says Osoba

Super Welterweight boxer, Abdulafeez "Big Name" Osoba has said his opponent at GOtv Boxing Night 30, Christopher Ucheji, will fall again, when they face off on December 26.

Having defeated Ucheji earlier this year, 'Big Name' said the fight, scheduled for the Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos, will end in his favour, like the first encounter.

"We fought in May and defeated him. It was a unanimous decision, and I will do it again. I am in a better shape than when we met earlier, which means he should expect a tougher match," 'Big Name' said.

The boxing event will also feature five other fights, including two title bouts. Taiwo "Gentle Boy" Olowu, will face off with Ghanaian boxer, Michael Ansah, for the West African Boxing Union (WABU) super welterweight title, while Sifon "Best" Iwatt and Saheed Azeez, will slug it out for the national super flyweight title.

Arabambi Ojo and Ibrahim "Golden Boy" Opeyemi, will face each other, in a national bantamweight challenge bout, while Ayanfe Adeoye will face Ahmed Ganiyu in the national light welterweight category. In the female category, national female cruiserweight champion, Bolatito "Black Tito" Oluwole, will duel with Blessing Abisoye, in a national challenge fight.

Sponsored by GOtv and supported by Supa Komando, Classic FM, Beat FM, Nigeria Info FM, PulseNg and LegitNg, GOtv Boxing Night 30 will broadcast live on SuperSport Variety 4 (DStv ch 209) and SuperSport Select 2 (GOtv ch 64 Channel).



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Adesina to African Leaders

"What Africa lacks is not money. What Africa lacks is lack of bankable ideas. Remember, money will always follow great ideas. All this matters to me personally because I do not want to see the continued exodus of young people who risk their lives to dangerously cross land and sea to go to Europe at all cost"

–President, AfDB, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina

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Ndigbo, the Kolanut and Other Matters

A few days ago Ohaneze Ndigbo called on the president to release Nnamdi Kanu and grant amnesty to the persons and groups (if any) connected with the Independent People of Biafra. (IPOB). The statement came out with the right decibel of dignity. Then it was promptly followed by an IPOB spokesman, Emma Powerful, who said: "We disagree with the statement of Ohaneze Nigbo president, Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, who was appealing to the Federal Government of Nigeria, led by Ahmed Bola Tinubu, to release Nnami Kanu and grant IPOB Members amnesty".

What IPOB wants, instead, is a UN-supervised Biafra Referendum. In other words, that its ultimatum on the irreducible minimum list of demands stands.

Does this then mean that the South East geopolitical zone is still unable to say what it really wants from Nigeria? I think not. Those who think thus should look more closely and think more carefully. The assumption that it is all about discordant voices, with each group appearing more eager to be seen taking up its issues in the public domain, than consulting other stakeholders in order to arrive at a domestic consensus before heading to the Village Square, is open to question today.

Like the South west, the South East geopolitical zone made one of the most structured presentations during the last national conference. Its initial consultations on how to go about the main conference itself was exemplary in how it took due cognizance of the myriadd of issues and streamlined them all in order to secure some measure of internal consensus. Unfortunately for the geopolitical zone, it entered the arena on d-day with a maximalist position it was unable to drive successfully, or convincingly, before other stakeholders in the Nigerian project.

It is trite to say that the far-reaching positive recommendations of that conference did not see the light of day. Those who blame Buhari today for the stillbirth of conference outcomes overlook a simple fact: Nothing was done about the conference outcomes by President Jonathan. He handed over to Buhari, who declared from the beginning that he was not going to look at the ocument – and he did not.

True, there were very strong political undercurrents that affected the trajectory of some aspects of eh Jonathan Presidency, especially before, during and after the conference. True there was so much a man coul o, when confronte with a collapsing building and renegade acolytes. But the records have it that he did nothing with the conference outcomes. That is history, as recorded, whether true or not

It is against the background of the forgoing that the title of this article speaks to some notional, political and socio-cultural phenomena that are relevant to the unfolding events in the South East today. Native Igbo wisdom tells us that it is the name you give your dog that people will call it, provided that your dog has not been named on your behalf by your enemies without consulting you. It is also native wisdom among Ndigbo to say that a full-bodied man who elects to walk with a limp should not blame anyone if is called a cripple, provided of course that his enemies did not break one of his legs when no one was watching and then made him to step out in public with the damaged leg.



Kanu

The Igbo also further say that anyone who enters the village square during a wrestling event without being prepared for a fight, and who then finds his back on the ground, will have defeat recorded against his name, provided he was not pushed into the arena against his will – after his hands had been tied by his enemies.

There are are rules of engagement in all things. Attention to the serious business and implications of breaking the Kolanut in Igbolan has lessons for group cohesion today. There is a process to the breaking of the kolanut. The 'process' of dealing with the kolanut is not the same thing as 'the fact' of breaking the kolanut in Igboland.

While some Igbo communities allow the youngest person in a group to break the kolanut, based on the belief that a young person is less contaminated by the evils of this world, those who prefer that elders should break the kolanut submit that the ancestors and the gods are likely to take the offerings of an elder more seriously than that of a younger person who is not initiated into any of the mysteries of life. But the important thing is that the accepted paradigm in any society is usually not violated.

That is why you have the Igbo saying: 'When an old dibia (native doctor) makes an offering to the gods it is like the handing over of the sacrifice to the spirits by one who is seeing them face to face'. A cursory look at the core community values encapsulated in the 'process' of eating the kolanu may be of some help in resolving the philosophical underpinnings of the crisis of the South East today.

The person whose breaks the kolanut does not just pick it up and break it for consumption. He may begin by saying: "He who brings kolanut brings life'. To explain this common preface to the kolanut business in Igboland, we need only remember that when kolanut is served, no one eats it without first calling on the gods and the good ancestors for protection and guidance. This means that the presence of the kolanut at a gathering is, first and foremost, an opportunity for prayers. The purpose of prayers is to strengthen life and the living. Therefore, to bring kolanut is to bring an opportunity for prayers, for humble appeal for guidance and for the strengthening of life and the living'.

Since the living envisaged in the Igbo notion of community is always a 'living together with one another in goodwill', the kolanut is also a symbol of communion. That is why the person praying over the kolanut before breaking it says: 'He Who lives above, the Giver of life, protect us'. He will also say that the river should not dry up and that the fish should not lack water to swim in. This is because the dancing fish enhances the economic value and aesthetic appeal and overall beauty of the river, while the life of the fish depends on the steady flow of the river. What is captured here is the reciprocity in nature. This demands that the fish should not pray for the river to dry up, so that the river does not pray for the death of the fish by simply falling victim to the prayers of the foolish fish.

The point of all this is that the kolanut is not something you eat because you are hungry. It is also not a snack, but a symbol of communion. Since the Igbo man does not eat it in the company of others without calling on all the good forces of nature for protection and guidance, and since the purpose of prayers and supplication is to ensure life more abundant for the living, it follows that the bringing of kolanut is the same as bringing an opportunity to ask the gods for strength and for increased life.

Therefore, 'he who brings kolanut brings life'. Thus, you have the saying: "It is only when men no longer have fingernails with which to split the kolanuts into the tiniest possible pieces that we can hope to hear that the kolanut did not go round at a public event". Denial of kolanut is a statement of ontological exclusion. It is also a very serious matter. Thus the one who says: 'Elders shall live and the young shall live" while breaking the kolanut, or the one who says: "Our harvest shall be rich and none shall pray for the misfortune of another, lest his farm be the only patch of earth without rain" are basically making the same point about reciprocity and mutual goodwill.

Against The background of the foregoing, Ndigbo should take a calm, sober look at their Ikenga, as it stands today. A man's Ikenga, tells you everything you need to know about him, is usually a carved wooden image on which is etched all the attainments of the owner of the Ikenga; including all his titles. The Ikenga of Ndigbo on display at the moment is being istorte in many ways, from within an without. Let all remember the virtue of the kolanut ritual for the good of all and restrain themselves from taking domestic matters to the monthly village market.

The position of IPOB on the condition of Nidgbo in Nigeria today is understandable. It is a response to the core challenges of marginalization facing the South East. The question is whether the methods can deliver on the perfectly legitimate aspiration of IPOB towards self-determination. Yes, IPOB Wants a referendum, to determine the Igbo preference in terms of the political future and fortunes of the people. But is it IPOB that will invite the UN into Nigeria? Is it not obvious that the a UN intervention without the invitation of all concerned parties would be the equivalent of violating the sanctity of a sovereign state?

It was until he was arrested and detained that the late Chief MKO Abiola realized the true meaning of international politics. The painful discovery that the US had no business with the internal affairs of a nation, and that this superpower was also worried about a man who was calling for reparation and raising a lot of dust even without being the president of Africa's most powerful nation, was Abiolas ultimate undoing.

Are there lessons in all of this to which IPOB is not paying attention? With the South East now everyone in Nigeria to be under the reign of a group that seems to be stifling everything in commerce that the zone needs, will IPOB really attract the international sympathy, empathy an endorsement it craves?

Just asking.

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