

PILOT

NIGERIAN

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NEWSPAPER WITH CONSCIENCE



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Reps summon Character Commission Chairman!



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Reject her claim that she failed to appear before Reps panel Tuesday due to ill-health

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69,854 civil servants captured under IPPIS – Dr. Yemi-Esan



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Pilot Personality



Abimbola Ayo-Yusuf: Combating Administrative Injustice Through PCC

THE Honourable Chief Commissioner, Public Complaints Commission (PCC), Abimbola Ayo-Yusuf, was appointed into his current office on June 1, 2021 taking over from the former Honourable Chief Commissioner, Hon. Barr. Chille Igbawua, in accordance with provisions of the law establishing the Commission. At the same time, the National Assembly appointed 37 other Federal Commissioners for the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory.

The then Senate President, Sen. Ahmad Ibrahim Lawan, while announcing the appointment cited the provisions of Section 2 (1) of the Public Complaints Commission Act, which states that, "the Chief Commissioner and other Commissioners shall be appointed

by the National Assembly and shall be persons of proven integrity and shall possess such other qualifications as the National Assembly may determine." Ayo-Yusuf was the PCC Commissioner for Lagos State.

Since his taking over the leadership of the PCC, he has been pushing for the successful implementation of the mandate, policies and programmes of the Commission. The Public Complaints Commission (PCC) was established primarily to fight against corruption, especially administrative activities that trample on the rights of workers and, of course, citizens of Nigeria.

In line with the operation of the Commission, any citizen who feels aggrieved can write officially to the PCC and such matters are

investigated and a hearing session is conducted to give fair hearing to all parties. At the end of the day, there is peaceful resolution and most importantly, restoration of peace among parties. All this is done free of charge. That is why the Commission is different from the court. It does not require a complainant hiring legal counsel to represent them.

Between 1 July 2021 when Ayo-Yusuf assumed office and November 2022, a total of 125,064 out of 173,500 complaints were resolved with the complaints coming mainly from the Nigerian workforce and the downtrodden who ordinarily could not afford the cost of justice in the Nigerian Judicial System.

It would be recalled that the hub of the whistle blowing policy

and provide confidentiality for whistleblowers, Mr Ayo-Yusuf said the commission has over the years served as chair of the Interagency Task Team on Anti-Corruption.

The Commission has been able to secretly receive, investigate, process and refer cases from whistleblowers to relevant agencies for further investigation and prosecution while protecting the whistleblower," he said.

Under his leadership, the PCC received the backing of the members of the National Assembly to extend the campaign against administrative corruption and abuse of office and power down to the local government of the federation in order to drastically reduce corruption and bad governance at the third tier of government.

EDITORIAL



NEED FOR AGGRESSIVE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

We are fully aware that it takes a lion heart to fight entrenched rot; that is why we want to use this noble platform to urge the Tinubu government to raise its ante, be more aggressive by maintaining its killer instinct in the fight against corruption without fear or favour.

The way and manner the Buhari administration, through the campaign of calumny, tarred the 16 years of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governance of Nigeria with corruption label, especially the Jonathan administration, was ferocious and destructive.

That is why recent revelations alleging huge fraud, money laundering and outright looting of public treasury perpetrated by top government officials under the glaring watch of the immediate past president, who was hailed then as an anti-corruption hero in Africa, is most shocking to Nigerians and members of the international community.

Where was the anti-corruption hero when all the alleged rot went on? Where were the anti-corruption agencies?

Since the new administration took over power on May 29, 2023, some of the recent policy actions of the President of Nigeria, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, have created a significant amount of positive impression on the minds of many Nigerians that, he is ready to tackle the issue of corruption decisively.

Looking at the two dramatic scenarios involving the suspended governor the Central Bank of Nigeria

(CBN), Mr. Godwin Emefiele and the suspended Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mr. Abdulrasheed Bawa, it was a remarkable display of courage.

Recall that also in a related development, a vocal member of the House of Representatives (Yankwashi/Roni/Gwiwa/Kazaure Federal Constituency), Gudaji Kazaure, made stunning corruption allegations against key officials under the Buhari administration and agencies and called President Tinubu to ensure that they are arrested and prosecuted.

We strongly urge that those weighty allegations should be thoroughly investigated.

As a newspaper, our editorial board is fully ready to support the present administration's anti-corruption campaign in exposing corrupt public officers who have defrauded Nigeria's commonwealth through investigative and exclusive reportage.

We are fully aware that it takes a lion heart to fight entrenched rot; that is why we want to use this noble platform to encourage the Tinubu government to raise its ante, be more aggressive by maintaining its killer instinct in the fight against corruption without fear or favour.

NIGERIAN PILOT

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We are a newspaper with conscience. Our mission is anchored on transparency, accountability and democratic values. We are committed to empower citizens with the truth they need to make informed decision and be active participants in the democratic process.

VISION

To produce a newspaper with a unique identity and pride that serves the public interest, record the history of our nation and its people, and make a difference when it matters.



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Nigeria updates its future of work report

Agency Report

Federal Government has said Nigeria is updating its Future of Work Report (FoW) to keep up with the constant transformation and diverse challenges in the workplace.

The government said the decision to upgrade the FoW is to allow Nigeria to align with the rest of the world to ensure that the World of Work and Labour Administration System is properly secured in line with Best Practice.

The Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, Kachollom Daju, made this known in her keynote address delivered at a One-Day Stakeholders Consultative Forum To Update Nigeria's Future of Work held in Abuja.

According to a statement by Olajide Oshundun, the Director, Press and Public Relations at the ministry of labour and employment, the

permanent secretary stressed that Government was well aware of the fact that a harmonious industrial relations climate was crucial to achieving economic growth and sustained development, and it was against this backdrop that the ministry deemed it necessary to Update Nigeria's Future of Work Report.

The statement quoted Daju as explaining that over time Nigeria relied on the International Labour Standards adopted by the ILO with regards to national peculiarities and developmental goals as the benchmark to draw up guidelines and policies through which the government had provided and maintained control for the world of work in Nigeria.

She further said that Work evolution which had been driven by technological innovations, demographic shifts, economic instability, climate change and

globalisation needed a reassessment of the guiding principles if the Social Justice of the ILO and its constituents were to remain relevant and survive the next 100 years.

According to her, in response to emerging issues challenging the future of work such as insecurity, information technological improvements, artificial intelligence, casualisation, illicit drug use, mismatch for available jobs which are creating multi-sectoral decent work deficits that must be addressed holistically, it has become imperative that Government incorporates new approaches to tackle its peculiarities so as to survive the internal and external threats to the survival of the world of work in Nigeria.

She observed that as highlighted in the 2019 Report, the need to shift from formal to informal jobs to address youth unemployment aligned with the current realities in the country

today where skills acquisition had taken centre stage gaining ground internationally and with the country's rapidly growing population, Nigeria will require at least 40 to 50 million jobs to keep up with its population.

The Permanent Secretary called on stakeholders to critically analyze the document before them being cognisant of Nigeria's peculiarities and current realities.

Speaking earlier, Mrs Juliana Adebambo, Director Productivity Measure and Labour Standards, stated that the Ministry in conjunction with the ILO was updating the 2019 Report to reflect transformative processes

that needed to be accelerated and address serious concerns such as inequality, unemployment, underemployment, child labour, forced labour and migration.

She noted that with a strong political will and co-ordination the FoW in Nigeria will be safeguarded through investment in education and training, bridging gender gaps, inequality and discrimination, ensuring rights at work, extending social protection, and supporting the private sector to create jobs, promoting productivity and technological pathways for decent work.



43% of Nigerian children aged 5-11 still engaged in child labour – FG

By Michael Oche

The Federal Government has estimated that over 43 per cent of Nigerian children aged between 5 and 11 years are actively involved in economic activities, including the worst forms of Child Labour.

Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, Daju Kachollom stated this in Abuja during a road walk to commemorating the 2023 World Day Against Child Labour and also draw attention to the danger of the menace.

Kachollom who led a walk to the headquarters of the National Human Rights Commission said the figures reflect the degree of urgency required by the various actors working on child labour to proffer solutions to the reduction and possible elimination of child labour in Nigeria and globally.

Referencing the 2016 – 2017 MICS Survey, the permanent Secretary said 39% of children involved in child labour are working under hazardous conditions including quarrying granite, artisanal mining, commercial sexual exploitation, armed conflict, and sometimes are victims of human trafficking.

The 2023 World Day Against Child Labour (WDAKL) has as its theme: "Social Justice for All. End Child Labour".

According to Kachollom, the Federal Government recognises the importance of addressing the issue of child labour hence its commitment to eradicating the menace.

She said this year's celebration was aimed at reinvigorating international action to achieve social justice and elimination of Child Labour.

She described Child Labour as a grave concern that affects millions of children worldwide, denying them their fundamental rights to education, health, mental and moral development and a childhood free from all forms of exploitation.

She said, "The WDAKL serves as a reminder that the fight against child labour requires sustained efforts and collective action.

"The commitment of the Federal Government of Nigeria in contributing to the global fight against child labour and its worst forms is evidenced in the following interventions, programmes, activities and partnerships.

"The adoption and ratification of ILO Conventions No138 and No.182,

Enactment of the Child Rights Act to domesticate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, The 36 States of the Federation and the FCT have domesticated the Child Rights Act.

"Review of the National Policy on Child Labour and the National Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labour, Development of the List of Hazardous Child Labour, Review of the Labour Act to mainstream Child Labour into the Labour Standards Bill which replaces the Labour, including the adoption of 15 years as the minimum age for employment among others.

Kachollom however listed some of the challenges in the elimination of Child Labour in Nigeria including poverty, cultural/religious factors, poor educational system, inadequate social protection systems and wrong perception of the negative effects of Child Labour.

She said the Ministry of Labour and Employment intends to continue active collaboration with relevant stakeholders to develop and implement collective strategies that contribute to the eradication of child labour.

Plateau Police warn against planned protest over sealing of LGA Secretariats

By Golok Nanmwa, Jos

Plateau State Police Command on Tuesday warned that it will not tolerate any protest by staff of local government areas in the state over the sealing of their secretariats by the police.

It could be recalled that the Former Inspector General of Police, Baba Usman Alkali, had ordered the sealing of the secretariats following issues that arose over the sack of all the 17 elected chairmen and their replacement with transition committees.

The Plateau Police command in a statement signed by the spokesperson, Alfred Alabo, said that they got intelligence reports that some group of persons in the name of Local Government Unions is planning a protest in the state.

The statement reads in parts "It will be recalled that on 15/06/2023, the Inspector General of Police ordered the sealing of all 17 Local Government Secretariats on the Plateau due to intelligence received that some hoodlums are trying to unleash mayhem in all the Local Government Areas of the State, due to dissatisfaction springing from the appointment of interim chairmen by the newly inaugurated State

Government.

The action became necessary as our proactive/statutory duty of the Police, as we are duty bound to intervene in the face of any treat or break down of law and due to the several acts of lawlessness exhibited by some persons in some local government secretariat, hence we took the action to ensure that there is no breakdown of law and order in the 17 LGAs.

"But unfortunately, on Tuesday, intelligence at our disposal revealed that some group of persons in the name of Local Government Unions is planning a protest in the state.

"The Commissioner of Police CP Bartholomew N. Onyeka therefore warns that the security situation in the state is still fragile and will not fold its arms and watch any form of threat to the corporate existence of the state and the fragile peace that we are currently enjoying in the State.

"The CP further warns that in the event of any breakdown of law and order, destruction of life and properties, the leaders of these groups will be fished out and made to face the law, as the case between the State and Local Government Councils in question is still in court, he said.

Gov Mutfwang pledges to upgrade Yakubu Gowon Airport

By Golok Nanmwa, Jos

Plateau State Governor, Barr. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang has expressed readiness to upgrade the famous Yakubu Gowon Airport to an international status with a view for it to take its rightful place in the aviation industry in northern Nigeria.

He said the importance of the airport cannot be over emphasized because it forms part of the critical infrastructure the state has and was known for in the early 70s.

A statement signed by Bere Gyang his director of press and public affairs reads that Governor Mutfwang disclosed this when the Manager of Yakubu Gowon Airport, Rindam Domtur led Members of his Management team on a courtesy visit to the Executive Governor at the new Government House, Little Rayfield, Jos.

"We are blessed to have this airport which was supposed to serve like a hub for the entire Northeast. It is sad

that the airport has diminished and lost its relevance over the years. Each time I went into the airport, and I saw Yakubu Gowon Airport I knew something was missing, the word International. And if not for politics, I believe that Jos Airport should have been an International Airport. By the grace of God, we will strive to see we achieve the status of an International Airport.

"This is not because Jos deserves it, but because it is associated with an Icon that we cannot forget in Nigeria's history. We must therefore bring honour to that place by seeking collaboration and cooperation to make the airport regain its status as perhaps one of the strategic airports in the Northern part of the country", he said.

He pledged to engage the Ministry of Aviation to see how the state can also partner together towards Public Private Partnership to bring life and attract activities to the international airport.

FG identifies poverty, vulnerability as major challenges facing Nigeria

Agency Report

Federal Government has identified poverty and vulnerability as among the major challenges facing Nigeria.

The Permanent Secretary, Political and Economic Affairs, Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Esuabana Nko-Asanye, made this known during the opening ceremony of a two-day policy and programmatic dialogue workshop on Nigeria's poverty profile and social register.

The programme which was

organised by UNICEF, the Ministry of Finance among others focused on Nigeria's poverty profile and social register.

The permanent secretary, who represented the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, George Akume, said it was crucial to recognise the impact of the issues of poverty and vulnerability on Nigerians citizens.

"Poverty and vulnerability remain pressing challenges in our country, and as we gather here today, it is crucial to recognise the impact of

these issues on our fellow citizens. Despite progress in reducing poverty rates in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with new challenges, pushing approximately 63 per cent of our population into multidimensional poverty of which almost 70 million are children.

"This setback emphasises the urgency to strengthen our efforts in mitigating these issues and improving the lives of millions of Nigerians," Nko-Asante said.

Speaking further, he said Nigeria's social inequalities have further

exacerbated the situation, as access to essential resources such as food; education, healthcare, and infrastructure are unevenly distributed.

"Women, children, and persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable groups facing poverty, ill-health, and economic shocks," he said.

Also speaking, the country representative UNICEF Nigeria, Christian Munduate, applauded various efforts of government and development partners in combating

poverty and vulnerability.

Munduate said she has personally witnessed the menace of poverty across the country and its toll in several aspects of people's lives, including education.

"From Lagos to Sokoto, I have met individuals like Tutu, a struggling single mother, and Umar, a child deprived of education, who personify the reality of our poverty statistics.

"As of 2022, 63 per cent of our population faces deprivation, a disturbing figure that includes 70 million children," she said.

Confusion as DSS, Prison officials fight over Emeifele's custody

By Kenneth Atavti

There was Confusion at the Federal High Court, Lagos between operatives of the Department of State Services DSS and officials of Nigeria Correctional Service as they tussled over who keeps custody of the suspended Central Bank of Nigeria Governor, Godwin Emeifele.

Emeifele was arraigned by the Federal Ministry of Justice for illegal possession of firearms and ammunition but was granted bail in the sum of N20m with one surety, following his "not guilty" plea.

As the defendant's lawyers were trying to perfect his bail conditions, a mild drama played out within

the court premises between DSS operatives who are fully hooded and NCS over who will take custody of the embattled CBN boss which was eventually whisked away by the Plain clothes police in a White Hillux Van.

Two Hilux vehicles belonging to the two government agencies were positioned near the entrance of the court.

The prison service also brought dogs into the court premises.

Sources said that there are moves by the DSS operatives to re-arrest Emeifele despite the bail granted to him by the court, which was later on carried out by the Operatives of the Department of State Security Services.



L-R: Former National Chairman, All Progressives Congress, (APC) Sen. Abdullahi Adamu; Former APC National Secretary, Sen. Iyiola Omisore, and Special Adviser to the President on Monetary Policies, Mr Wale Edun during their Visit to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, at the Presidential Villa Abuja yesterday. Photo: BIODUN BAMIDELE

Anthrax: Stay away from infected animals, Osun Govt warns butchers

By Richard Akintade, Osogbo

Osun State Government under the leadership of Senator Ademola Adeleke has sounded a note of warning to the butchers in the State to stay away from the animals infected with the deadly disease, anthrax.

The Director, Veterinary Services Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Dr. Abosede Olatokun gave the warning during a sensitization tour to the butchers at Sabo market, Osogbo, the State Capital.

Mrs. Olatokun, identified butchers in the State as one of the major stakeholders in the livestock industry, explaining that, "Anthrax" is a bacterial infection that affects animal species like Cattle, Sheep, Goat, Camels, Donkeys, horses, pigs and wildlife.

She noted that the present administration prioritises the health and welfare of the people of the State, thereby calling on the butchers to take caution in order not to infect people with the disease.

The veterinary expert stressed further that the disease "Anthrax" has a forming bacterium known as Bacillus anthracis which primarily affects animals which can also affect human beings who come in direct contact with the infected animal either dead or living.

In his own words, the Deputy Director in the department, Dr. Joseph Tanimowo corroborated Dr. Olatokun, revealing some of the signs that may be seen on infected animals, which may begin

to manifest from 1-8 weeks after exposure to the anthrax spores like fever, chill, cough, muscle aches and weaknesses, chest discomfort and difficulty in breathing.

He added that affected animals are usually found dead without any signs of illness, advancing that dark unclotted blood flowing from body openings like nose, mouth, ear, and anal region of the affected animals, also the carcass does not become stiff after death.

He counseled the butchers not to touch any animal showing signs of the disease, pointing out that the dead or sick animal(s) should be promptly reported to the veterinary authority for proper action, assuring them that the State Government has made provisions for treatment of any infected animal that has not gone beyond control.

While responding, Chairman, Osun Butchers Association, Mr. Adebimpe Suleiman, appreciated the State Governor, Senator Adeleke for taking a proactive measure in curbing the spread of the disease in Osun.

The Chairman, however, appealed to the State Government to provide a central Abattoir, adding that having a cattle market in the state will assist both the Government and cattle sellers to prevent buying an infected animal.

Also speaking, one of the members of the association, Mr. Isiaka Ojelowo, enjoined the State Government to support the association financially per adventure, if any butcher runs into loss as a result of buying infected cattle.

Senate asks FG to halt proposed electricity tariff increase

By Olugbenga Salami

Senate, on Tuesday, called on the federal government to intervene and halt the proposed increase in electricity tariff by the distribution companies, DISCOs.

It also urged the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission, NERC to decentralize the proposed engagement with stakeholders scheduled for Abuja to the six geopolitical zones of the federation for effective participation by all.

The Senate's resolutions were sequel to a motion, titled: "Need to halt the proposed increase in electricity tariff by eleven successor electricity distribution companies, DISCOs" by Senator Yunus Akintunde (APC Oyo Central) and co-sponsored by Senators Ekpenyong Asuquo (PDP Cross River South) and Aminu Abbas (PDP Adamawa Central), during plenary.

Leading debate on the motion, Senator Akintunde, noted that the 11 successor DISCOs have filed an application for rate review with the NERC, saying that "the request for rate review is premised on the need to incorporate macro-economic parameters and other factors affecting the quality of service, operations and sustainability of the companies."

Senator Akintunde informed that the commission, in line with its mandate, requested the general public for comments on the rate review applications by the distribution licenses, while advising interested stakeholders to review and consider the excerpts of the applications filed with the commission by the respective licenses.

The lawmaker further observed that NERC, according to the powers conferred by Electricity Act 2023, is empowered to conduct a rate case hearing on the applications prior to making a ruling, adding that the commission had through its official website published and set July 20, 2023 deadline for comments by stakeholders.

Senator Akintunde expressed concern that "the proposed increase will significantly impact the affordability of electricity for the average Nigerian, further exacerbating the financial burdens faced by households and businesses."

He added that it would impede industrial growth, job creation and economic development while it would also "have adverse effects on the nation's drive towards sustainable development and poverty reduction." According to him, the time frame of less than one week provided by

the NERC for comments from all relevant stakeholders was too small for any meaningful engagement.

The lawmaker said "it is essential to address the issues of inadequate power supply, metering and quality of service provided by the DISCOs", pointing out that "customers should not bear the brunt of inefficiencies in the power sector."

The Senate, in its further resolutions, urged NERC to explore alternative measures to address the financial challenges faced by DISCOs such as improving operational efficiency, reducing technical and commercial losses, and enhancing revenue collection mechanisms.

It also asked DISCOs to henceforth discontinue estimated billing and make available to all electricity consumers prepaid meters at affordable prices.

The Red Chamber later mandated its Committee on Power, when constituted, to engage with the Federal Ministry of Power, NERC and other stakeholders to find lasting solutions to the challenges facing the electricity sector, including the need for comprehensive reforms.

It added that DISCOs should henceforth liquidate the cost of electricity transformers purchased by communities or individuals before they are added to the billing system.

Tension as Tinubu sends ministerial list to Senate in next 48 hours

By Okechukwu Jombo

Senate leader, Micheal Opeyemi Bamidele has disclosed that the much expected Ministerial list will be received by the Senate in the next 48 hours.

Bamidele said that President Tinubu had informed him on Tuesday morning that he is working to ensure that the list gets to the Senate in the next 48 hours.

The senate leader stated this at a book presentation held to mark his 60th birthday anniversary lecture.

Speaking earlier, President of the Senate Godswill Akpabio lamented that Governors in Nigeria always fight their successors immediately after they assume office.

Akpabio who expressed displeasure with the attitude of governors to their successors said there is no former governor that has not have issue with his governor citing issue of Senator Adams Oshiomole, Senator Adamu Ailero apart from that of Ekiti state, Abiodun Oyebamiji.

The President of the Senate said, "The Governor of Ekiti state is a

great example of what leadership should be, he has remained steadfast.

"As a Governor, the moment you hand over power to your successor, he will turn on you, either his taste will change or attitude, there is no any governor in Nigeria that has no problem with their successor apart from Ekiti governor there is why we have to celebrate Senator Micheal Opeyemi Bamidele for the kind of his person."

Speaking also at the event, former Vice Chancellor of University of Lagos, Prof. Toyin

Ogundipe disclosed that Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIO) have no business in the convoy of President Bola Tinubu and Vice President Kashim Shettima once the Police is in the convoy.

The former vice who delivered a lecture at the 60th birthday anniversary lecture said that there is for political office holders to reduce the number of vehicles in their convoy to show to Nigerians that they feel their pains in this season.

Ogundipe said, "There is a need for our leaders to reduce the

number of vehicles in their convoy so that Nigerians will know that you feel their pains.

"There is nothing the VIO, Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) are doing in the entourage of the President and Vice President once you have police I'm the convoy."

Speaking on the issue of Insecurity in Nigeria, Prof. Ogundipe said that the issue of insecurity is a global problem saying there are more crimes in the countries condemning Nigeria, but it is possible to change the narrative because they control cyber space.

Benue Assembly to probe civil servants outcry over payment of salaries

By Sunday Ogli, Makurdi

THE Benue State House of Assembly has constituted an Ad hoc Committee to verify salaries and wage bills of civil servants in the state.

Recall that there was outcry by some civil servants following recent payment of salaries.

The Committee, according to a press release by the Chief Press Secretary, CPS to the Speaker of the House, Raphael Akume Ityav, Hon Easter Tiseer chairs the committee while Hon Matthew Damkor, Hon Gyila Solomon are members.

Other members of the Committee according to Ityav, include Hon Manger Manger, Hon Yanmar Ortese, Hon Micheal Audu, Hon Kennedy Angbo, Hon Blessed

Onah, Hon. Bemdoo Ipusu and Hon Abraham Z Jabi.

The Committee urged those committees set up by the State Governor, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Alia, which include, Staff and Salary Verification, SUBEB/TSB, NUT, NULGE, the Auditor General of State, and Local Government to appear before it unfailingly today at the State Assembly complex by 10:00 am to explain the general outcry caused by their recent activities.

The Assembly appealed to those affected by the recent verifications: unions, groups, and associations not to go on protest but allow the ad hoc committee set up by the Assembly to carry out its fact-finding mission of resolving the problem.



Senate

Police neutralize 2 kidnap suspects, rescue victim in Kogi

By Friday Idachaba, Lokoja

NIGERIA Police Force, Kogi State Command, in collaboration with local vigilantes has killed two kidnap suspects and rescued a victim.

William Ovyo Aya (SP), Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), who disclosed this in a statement in Lokoja on Monday evening said the neutralized kidnap suspects were terrorizing Kogi State.

Aya said the team also rescued one kidnap victim and recovered one AK-49 rifle with 14 rounds of live ammunition.

"This was consequent upon a report that, some hoodlums invaded a Camp of one Yahaya of Igbo-Ero in Ife-Olukotun and kidnapped him.

"It was further revealed that the hoodlums kidnapped another victim which they later released after robbing him of one ram.

"The Divisional Police Officer promptly swung into action and mobilized a team of operatives in collaboration with the local vigilantes following intelligence and stormed their hideout.

"On sighting the joint Police, the hoodlums opened fire on them and during the gun duel that ensued, two suspected kidnapers were neutralized and the victim was rescued.

"One AK-49 rifle with 14 rounds of live ammunition were recovered while other suspects escaped with bullet wounds. Efforts are ongoing to apprehend the fleeing suspects", he said.

The Police Spokesperson said the Commissioner of Police, Bethrand Onuoha commended the joint Police and Vigilante team for the breakthrough.

The Commissioner, according to Aya, reiterated his determination to sustain the ongoing onslaughts against criminal elements and to deny them haven to operate in the state.

He urged members of the public to always collaborate with the security agencies to secure lives and property in Kogi State.

Gov Bago challenges HYPPADEC on more Social Responsibility Projects

By Hamed Salawu, Minna

Niger state governor, Mohammed Umar Bago has challenged the management of National - Hydro Power Producing Areas Development Commission N-HYPPADEC to embark on more social responsibility projects to the benefit of the hosting state.

Governor Bago threw the challenge while the management paid courtesy visit to the governor at government house Minna,

He noted that 32% benefit of the state was not enough.

The governor reiterated the commitment of the state government in partnering with the commission for effective and

efficient service delivery.

Bago expressed the dismay that Niger state has not been really recognized appropriately in position of power generation in Nigeria considering the state hosting of four dams.

The governor advocated for the need to ensure adequate sensitization and enlightenment of the communities to save lives and properties of the citizens as well as clearing water channels to curb flooding, just as to synergize with the state government in times of project implementations to avoid duplication.

Earlier, the Managing Director of HYPPADEC Alhaji Abubakar Sadiq Yelwa appreciated the contributions of the state and the governor towards the actualization of the commission and commitment for boosting the cordial working relationship for its operations.

Sadiq Yelwa revealed that the commission has amended its name to National - Hydro Power Producing Areas Development Commission

(N-HYPPADEC) while additional four states have been admitted that include; Gombe, Taraba, Nasarawa and Kaduna, noting that Niger state has the highest local councils of 17 with 3 area offices in New Bussa, Gwada and Bida respectively.

NDDC to secure future of Niger Delta beyond Oil – Ogbuku

By Philip Ezuma, Port Harcourt

The Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, has affirmed that it is focused on deepening partnerships and promoting investments to secure the future of Niger Delta people in the years beyond oil-driven economy.

Speaking during a three-day "Develop Ondo 2.0 Investment Summit" in Akure, Ondo State, the commission's Managing Director, Dr Samuel Ogbuku, voyched that partnerships with private sector and development partners would boost the funding for accelerated development in the Niger Delta region.

He noted: "Thinking beyond oil is not only a pathway to sustain development in the Niger Delta region, but it is also becoming inevitable as the reality of energy transition and global climate crisis

continues to stare us in the face."

"We need meaningful engagement of stakeholders, to form relevant and sustainable partnerships. That is why, in NDDC, we take time to listen to our stakeholders, to know their priorities, and ensure that our interventions adequately reflect them", he added.

The NDDC boss acknowledged the key role of state governments as stakeholders, noting that the Advisory Committee, made up of governors from NDDC member states, was an important consultative body that ensured collaboration. NDDC will ensure that there is synergy with the state governments, to reduce waste and inefficiency.

Ogbuku said further: "We need to be innovative in responding to the fast-changing landscape. The issues confronting us now demand more partnership and collaboration.

"In line with the partnership drive in NDDC, we hosted a Public

Private Partnership, PPP, summit in Lagos on April 25, with the theme: "Rewind to Rebirth", which attracted stakeholders from across the country and continent."

In his address, the Acting Governor of Ondo State, Hon. Lucky Aiyedatiwa, said that the state was targeting \$2 billion through investments that would transform the state into an industrial hub.

He stated: "The response from potential investors thus far has been highly encouraging, with growing interest in exploring the investment opportunities that Ondo State offers."

"Our previous summit has borne witness to remarkable success stories, illustrating the effectiveness of this platform in attracting investments and fostering economic growth in our State and enormous values to our partners and investors", he said.

According to him, "one such success story lies in the corridor of

NEWS

Job racketeering: Reps summon Character Commission Chairman!

Ask her to appear before its panel alongside 36 Commissioners unfailingly today

Reject her claim that she failed to appear before Reps panel Tuesday due to ill-health

Warn that failure to honour summons will attract stiff sanctions

She has knack for not honouring parliaments' invitations – Moses Anaughe

By Disun Amosun

The Chairman Federal Character Commission, Dr. Muiba Dankaka along with 36 Federal Commissioners have been summoned to appear before the House of Representatives Ad-hoc Committee investigating the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System IPPIS and Job Racketeering, unfailing at 11.00am today (Wednesday) with a warning that failure to do so, will attract stiff sanctions.

A visibly angry Committee Chairman, Rep Yusuf Gagdi gave the ruling yesterday when it became obvious that the Commission Chairman was trying to pull wools over the Committee's eyes by claiming medical reasons for not attending Tuesday Investigative Hearing, rather she sent a delegation of six Federal Commissioners, two Directors and the Secretary, backed by a letter personally signed by her for representation.

The Committee had initially taken Dr. Dankaka's excuse and representation request on the face

value and allowed the investigation to continue until another set of six Federal Commissioners from the same office walked into the venue and all hell broke loose.

The new set of Federal Commissioners led by the Delta State representative on the Commission's Board, Mr. Moses Anaughe, during self introduction gave their names, the states they represent and that they were categorical in saying they were not at the Hearing to represent the Board Chairman but to assist the Committee with vital information that will assist its investigation.

Moses Anaughe told the Committee that in line with her usual characteristics, the Board Chairman, Muiba Dankaka has a knack of not honouring Parliament's invitations to appear before its Committees saying that she would rather tell lies and give excuses for not appearing.

"I can tell you categorically that the Board Chairman is not indisposed, neither is she keeping any medical appointment as claimed. By the time I left the Commission's office around noon today (Tuesday) she was at her desk" Anaughe said.

There and then the Committee Chairman, Rep. Gagdi regretted not putting Dankaka's representatives on Oath before allowing them make presentations, a situation he quickly corrected by putting them on Oath and warned them that had he done so before, the revelation by their Delta colleague, if corroborated, those found to have lied on Oath are liable to two years of incarceration.

The other Federal Commissioners, who came latter also attested to the fact that the Commission Board Chairman was in fact at her desk as at noon when they left for the National Assembly.

The appearance of the 9th Assembly Chairman, Public Account Committee, Rep Oluwole Oke, who moved the motion that led to the investigation on the panel added impetus to the Hearing, as his vast experience in engaging public institutions and their chief executives added momentum to the whole exercise.

The IPPIS, taken earlier under the aegis of the Auditor General's Office was given the leeway to go back and perfect all documents required by the Committee in achieving its mandate.

We can't achieve national development without your efforts, Tinubu tells Nigerians in Diaspora

By Agency report

President Bola Tinubu has asked Nigerians in the diaspora to fully commit to the joint task of nation-building.

Tinubu, represented by Femi Gbajabiamila, the chief of staff (CoS), spoke on Tuesday while marking the National Diaspora Day in Abuja.

The event, organised by the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), was themed "Consolidating Diaspora engagement for national development".

The president assured Nigerians abroad that his administration will be friendly and provide an enabling platform for effective policies that would see the diaspora community galvanizing support for the country.

"Our country is on a new dawn to ensure national development, guarantee peace, and promote prosperity for our entire nation's people," Tinubu said.

"The ambition we have in this regard cannot be fully realised without the support and enthusiastic participation of our brothers and sisters all over the world.

"As such, all deliberate efforts will be made in this administration to ensure that the Diaspora community is pertinently involved in designing, implementing, and reviewing public policy."

Tinubu added that it was gratifying to know that many citizens in the Diaspora are uplifting the image of Nigeria in their host countries.

"In 2022, our Diaspora home remittances through official channels stood at \$21.9 billion, over four times the value of our foreign direct investment (FDI). The Nigerians in the Diaspora are also actively investing in our healthcare, agriculture, education, information and communication technology (ICT), housing and real estate, sports, transportation, oil and gas, and other sectors," he said.

"This, I must say is commendable and in our enlightened self-interest as only Nigerians both at home and abroad can develop Nigeria."

Abike Dabiri-Erewa, the NiDCOM chairperson, noted that many countries have evidence of accelerated national development courtesy of the contributions from their citizens in the Diaspora.

"Such efforts made impacts on capacity and infrastructural developments when properly deployed. Diaspora resources often create positive measurable ripple effects that could mitigate unemployment, leading to the improvement in the quality of life and reduction in poverty," Dabiri-Erewa said, adding that Nigeria cannot be an exception.

She asked the government to support and conclude the setting up of the Nigeria Diaspora investment fund (NDIF) as an investment window and emergency resource for citizens living abroad.

NAPTIP reinforces efforts to tackle human trafficking in Nigeria

By Ngozi Nwankwo

The hope of adequate protection for Nigerians against human trafficking, violence against persons, and other forms of exploitation has been reassured as the Director General of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, NAPTIP, Prof. Fatima Waziri - Azi said the Agency will continue to expand its operational horizon through improved partnership, and enhanced partnership with all stakeholders as well as diligent prosecution of offenders, to outsmart the criminal elements.

The assurances came just as the Director General cautioned desperate Nigerians against indiscriminate migration in the name of the popular "Japa" so as not to be enslaved by migrant smugglers who are poised at preying on their ignorance and vulnerability with the attendance consequences of mindless exploitation.

Waziri - Azi, stated this on the Special Edition of the online interactive programme tagged "Conversation with NAPTIP", put together as part of the activities to mark the 20th Anniversary of the establishment of the Agency and the 2023 World Day Against Human Trafficking.

Nigerian Pilot gathered that conversation with NAPTIP is a specially designed platform that promotes mutual interaction between the Agency and stakeholders for the purpose of enlightenment and feedback engagement in order to improve service delivery.

The Director General rolled out some of the modest achievements of the Agency within the past 20 years to include the conviction of 624 traffickers, the rescue of over 22,000 victims of trafficking, the national spread to 32 States across the Country, sponsoring of 19 survivors through University Education, development of several counter-trafficking policies, engagement with diver stakeholders including the Justice sector through the National Judicial Institute, NJI, and global partnership with critical partners to counter the emerging trends in human trafficking.

On the dynamism of human trafficking

in Nigeria and the response of the Agency in tackling them, Waziri - Azi reiterated that human trafficking has assumed a national spread across the country with the emerging trends including an increase in online cat fishing of youngsters by traffickers, fake job offers and advertorials, fake scholarship offers increase trafficking under cover of sporting activities, orphanage trafficking as well as buying and selling of babies.

"In the past 20 years, the crime of human trafficking has evolved in terms of trends and patterns. But, one thing I can say for sure is that Nigeria is better poised to tackle the issues of

human trafficking," she said.

According to her, through partnerships with global anti-trafficking Law Enforcement Agencies and corporate bodies such as Meta, owner of Facebook, and the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, the Agency has been able to tackle them effectively.

On the nagging issues of mass exodus of Nigeria abroad, the Director General who appreciates the concerns and plights of Nigerians who daily seek alternative places to settle outside the country urged them to be mindful of the Red Flag associated with human trafficking in order to avoid exploitation.

Benue teachers frown over 16 month's salary arrears, removal of professional entitlements

By Sunday Oglu, Makurdi

Nigerian Union of Teachers, NUT, Benue State chapter, has frowned at the removal of professional entitlements to teachers by the state government.

The state chairman of the union, Comrade Levi Akuma, who spoke during a telephone interview on Wednesday, decried the manner government has removed promotion learning society and examination allowances which are the rights of teachers.

Comrade Akuma said the union vigorously fought for promotion of its members, maintaining that this has been a law in the service that a junior grade level staff should stay on that particular level for 2 years and the next year he/she will be promoted while for the senior grade level, it 3 years before another promotion.

Hear him: "I do not know why people like to jump issues like that. Our complaint is that, we fought for our promotion. So, we have stayed upto 18 years without promotion. We continued to write a circular to the government and the 2021 government gave us a letter."

"In February of 2022, February, the government implemented the promotion. Then we discovered that we have 27.5 percent which the union also fought for. Teachers were demanding for a Teachers'

Service structure, TSS. We did not get that structure but later Northern Governors agreed to give that percent. It was implemented in Benue in 2010 and we have been collecting that until today. It was just in the months of May and June that we were recently paid.

"Then we discovered this on our payroll, they removed the promotion, learning society and examination. Then we complained that it is not correct, we are entitled to this. These are professional allowances and they are not supposed to take it.

"We learnt that over 2500 teachers have been taken away from our payroll. Some on grounds that they are ghost workers and others in the aspect that they were due for retirement and did not retire.

"So we said let government give us circular to the five years so that those who didn't fall within that, should go while those who are there, should remain. They have no power to force you to stay on the payroll. If your days are numbered in the service, you will go and give way for another person to come in.

"There was a time; the Attorney-General of the State wrote that they should stop retiring teachers based on the new edit of Federal government harmonizing teachers retirement age to 65 years. When that came, the State government did not domesticate it on time. It was in May last year, that it was domesticated and set the bill and gazetted.

69,854 civil servants captured under IPPIS, says Yemi-Esan

By Emmanuel Obisue

Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Dr. Folashade Yemi-Esan has disclosed that the ongoing verification exercise for civil servants across Ministries, Departments and Agencies, MDAs, has captured a total of 69,854 officers across the six geopolitical zones of the country.

The HoS who gave this assurance on Tuesday in Abuja at a Media Parley in commemoration of the 2023 Civil Service Week, said the verification exercise under the Integrated Personnel and Payroll

Personnel Information System, IPPIS, is necessary to kick out ghost workers and retain credibly employed civil servants.

She said the verification exercise has led to the detection of "1,618 fake/illegal employment letters, and subsequent suspension of the officers".

On the removal of fuel subsidy, she said the Federal Government is working assiduously to mitigate the sufferings of civil servants.

Yemi-Esan said a special committee has been set up to review minimum wage of civil servants; provide buses

to ease their transit to and from work, among other palliatives.

"Prior to the introduction of the current mechanisms put in place to drive the implementation of the IPPIS, the system was bedeviled with considerable leakages and wastes as well as the incessant infiltration of ghost workers etc," she said.

"Once you earn legally, you have no problem with the verification. What we are doing is to remove people who are earning salaries illegally," she explained while responding to questions from newsmen.



L-R: Clerk House of Representatives Ad-hoc Committee to investigate Federal Ministries, Department and Agencies, MDAs, Parastatals and Tertiary institution on mismanagement of Personnel Recruitment, Employment Racketeering And Gross Mismanagement of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), Chijoke Oriko; Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Hon. Benjamin Kalu and Chairman of the Committee, Hon. Yusuf Adamu Gagdi, during the Inaugural meeting of the Committee at the National Assembly in Abuja, yesterday.

FCTA begins auditing remittance of payroll deductions

By Chioma Nnodim

Federal Capital Territory Administration, FCTA, has flagged off the auditing of the remittance of statutory and non-statutory deductions from the payroll of workers from year 2010 to 2022, to ensuring that deductions from the payroll of workers are timely remitted to the third-party beneficiaries.

During the flag-off exercise in Abuja on Tuesday, the FCT Permanent Secretary, Mr. Olusade Adesola disclosed that the auditing of the remittances of payroll deductions is in line with the FCTA's objectives and commitment to ensure transparency, accountability and responsible financial management.

According to the Permanent Secretary, "the remittance of statutory deductions to be audited, according to the Permanent Secretary, include taxes, pensions and insurance, while the non-statutory deductions fall under employee contributions to cooperative societies and various welfare programmes.

"The audit exercise is also being carried out to ensure that the Administration's obligations to third-party beneficiaries are met with utmost integrity.

The Permanent Secretary, who noted that remittances of payroll deductions play pivotal roles in maintaining the welfare of the FCTA workforce, lamented that remittance for both statutory and non-statutory deductions from the payroll of workers since 2010 had faced some setbacks.

"Some of the problems created as a result of such non-remittances, he said; include the failure by FCTA retirees to claim their National Housing, NHF, funds from the Federal Mortgage Banks, due to non-posting of the deductions as a result of discrepancies in the schedules accompanying the payment of such deductions.

As a result, the FCT Administration, he said, found it expedient to engage an Audit Consultant, M/S G.E. Osagie and Co. to audit the payroll of the FCTA from 2010 to 2022 in order to establish the unremitted statutory and non-statutory deductions due as

liabilities to third party beneficiaries.

Meanwhile, the auditing exercise will determine the payments made to the various receivers of the statutory and non-statutory payments by staff and on behalf of each staff of the FCTA from 2010 to 2022 for NHF, FCT Health Insurance Scheme, Pay As You Earn, PAYE, and Cooperative deductions.

Additionally, the auditing exercise is to determine outstanding obligations for the FCTA to staff as well as ascertain individuals and officials responsible where deductions were not made and make recommendations as appropriate.

Stakeholders petition Tinubu, NASS, demand stoppage of Outsourced Agents in Expatriate Quota processing

By Our Correspondent

Stakeholders in Expatriate Quota processing have asked the federal government to stop using outsourced agents to process expatriate quota and petitioned President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Senate President, Speaker of the House of Representatives and others to investigate alleged sharp practices in the allocation processing.

The petitioners alleged that the process creates revenue leakages and jeopardizes national interest by allowing contractors to screen and have access to classified documents that are strategic to national security, economy, national and multinational companies and organizations.

The petition which was titled: "A Petition And An Urgent Call For A Forensic Investigation Into The High Scale Corruption, Fraudulent Activities, Abuse Of Office And Mismanagement Of Processing Of Expatriate Quota By

Officials Of The Federal Ministry Of Interior" was signed by the National Coordinator, Mr. Ene Utobong, National Secretary, Shegun Adewale and National Publicity Secretary, Ismaila Badejo.

The stakeholders accused top management of the Ministry of Interior and queried why the process that was running well without any hitch would be contracted to questionable private firms that are allegedly without professional and technical expertise.

According to the document, the so-called licensed agents are alleged to be cronies of top management officials who collect processing fees from companies and share among themselves thereby denying government huge revenues.

They therefore asked the president and the national law makers in both the Senate and House of Representatives to stop the suspicious process, block revenue leakages and prosecute suspected officials accordingly.

Uproar in Senate over Oshiomhole's 'looting' allegation

By Okechukwu Jombo

There was uproar in the Senate on Tuesday over a television interview reportedly granted by Senator Adams Oshiomhole (APC - Edo North) where he allegedly accused Senators of the 9th National Assembly of looting their offices at the end of their tenure in June, 2023.

The uproar followed a point of order moved by Senator Solomon Adeola (APC - Ogun West), saying his privilege was breached by Oshiomhole's allegation.

He called on Oshiomhole to apologise to the Senate for saying senators looted their offices.

Senator Adamu Aliero (PDP - Kebbi Central) supported Adeola, saying that Oshiomhole should apologise.

Following the revelation, Chief Whip of the Senate, Senator Mohammed Ali Ndume, through a point of order moved that the

Senate should dissolve into an executive session to deliberate on the "sensitive" matter.

At this point the Senate became rowdy as senators spoke against the call for an executive session.

However when the motion to go into closed door session was put to voice vote, Senators opted that the matter be discussed in plenary by voting "nay".

At this point, Senate President Godswill Akpabio called on Oshiomhole to approach the chair. After a brief talk with Oshiomhole, Akpabio called on Oshiomhole to state his own side of the matter.

Oshiomhole, in his submission, apologised for the comment saying he defended the Senate during his television interview under reference rather than indicting Senators of the 9th Senate for looting their offices.

Subsidy removal: Fast track work on palliatives for suffering masses, TUC tells FG

By Michael Oche

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) on Monday asked the Federal Government to speed up work on palliatives for Nigerians to cushion the economic effects of removal of subsidy on petrol.

President of the TUC, Festus Osifo, who briefed journalists in Abuja, said "cannot continuously speak grammar while Nigerians are suffering."

Nigerian Pilot reports that discussions between government and organised labour were adjourned on June 19 for eight weeks to enable the government to put together measures to cushion the economic effects of subsidy removal.

The eight weeks will end on August 18, 2023.

"Government should fast track the action and processes to ensure that work was concluded on all discussions on palliative packages," Osifo told journalists.

He said labour expects "the government to ensure that between now and the next two weeks all the committees must have submitted their reports for the Presidential Steering Committee to conclude its work immediately because we cannot continuously speak grammar while Nigerians are suffering. We cannot continuously speak English while people are trekking to work."

He restated organised labour's commitment to ensure the process is concluded as quickly as possible.

He said, "As TUC we are ready to meet; even at night or weekend to ensure that the government fast track these processes because the plight of the Nigerian workers is our main concern. Anything that affects the Nigerian workers is what we will strive to correct."

He also urged the government to reduce the cost of governance saying Nigerian workers and masses could not continue to adjust their belts while those in government continued to live large.

The TUC president urged those in government to lead by example by reducing the cost of governance.

He said: "The government cannot continuously ask workers and the battered Nigerian masses to continuously tie their belts. We have adjusted our belts and we have even exceeded the last hole while the government has continued to increase its largesse."

"Recently there was an uproar because the National Assembly wanted to purchase vehicles worth N40 billion and they earmarked N70 billion to be shared. They said it is about their condition of work. If you go to some ministries today, people are working without light; in some parastatals today the toilets are not working. We have some offices where civil servants buy chairs with their money and take them to their offices to work.

"The executive, legislature and judiciary must lead from the front while we follow them from behind as the followers. But in a situation where they push a lot of poverty to the masses and they are living in affluence we will not allow that to work. If the National Assembly cannot give a clear cut justification on what they think they are doing we will lead the entire Nigerian masses to besiege the National Assembly", he added.

He commended the President Bola Tinubu-led administration for shunning its earlier decision to share N8, 000 to 12 million vulnerable households.

"We raised that red flag and thank God they have listened. We know that N8, 000 is nothing. Even if the government said it wants to transfer N50, 000 to Nigerians, the question is: where is the data? How can the data be verified," the TUC leader asked.

He added: "Anything we call palliative must be things that we can verify. Not something that you will promise us and at the end of the day we don't know where any of those items have gone."

Politics



Tinubu meets with Abdullahi Adamu, Omisore at Aso Villa

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Kogi Guber: Nov. 11 is a referendum on Yahaya Bello's administration - Fanwo

By Lanre Oloyede

Kogi State Commissioner for Information and Communications, Hon. Kingsley Fanwo has said the November 11, 2023 Governorship Poll in the state is a referendum on the administration of Alh. Yahaya Bello.

Fanwo stated this while receiving the leadership of the Ododo Support Organisation led by its Director General, Dr Aminu Adaira in his office, Tuesday.

In his address, Dr Adaira gave the assurance that the Organisation has put structures in place to garner well over 400,000 votes for the APC Governorship Candidate, Alh. Usman

Ahmed Ododo, saying the APC candidate has all it takes to consolidate on the achievements of Alh. Yahaya Bello.

The Director General of the Ododo Support Organisation an independent Campaign Platform also appointed Hon. Fanwo as its Patron.

Responding, Fanwo thanked the organisation for finding him worthy of the task ahead.

"I am grateful that you found me worthy of the task of being the Patron of this noble organisation that is clearly the most organised among all the independent platforms campaigning for our Governorship Candidate, Alh. Ahmed Usman Ododo", he said.

He further stated that Alh. Usman Ododo is a detribalised leader full of capacity and



Fanwo

good leadership qualities to lead the state forward.

"Apart from the excellent leadership qualities of Alh

Ododo, November 11 will be a referendum on the administration of Alh. Yahaya Bello. Kogites will respond to the need for continuity with resounding affirmation.

"GYB has performed excellently in the area of education, healthcare, civil service reforms, agriculture, capacity building, youth and women inclusion, security and many others. Ododo was a member of his administration and a member of his political family. He will consolidate on his achievements.

"With due respect to the opposition party, they stand no chance in the coming poll. PDP that is supposed to be the main opposition party is already deserted and desolate. SDP keeps burning their office for

public sympathy. They are completely in disarray", he said.

The Information Commissioner urged members of the Organisation to go about their electioneering peacefully, saying APC is a party of peace.

His words: "Peace is our watchword as a party. The leader of the state, Governor Yahaya Bello is a man known for peace and security. We won't allow anyone disrupt the peace of the state before, during and after the election.

"We are not unaware of those vandalizing their office just to win public sympathy. They have forgotten that a tree without roots can never stand", he stated.

NSITF MD, Allagoa allegedly pays self N47m gratuity while still in office

By Okechukwu Jombo

The Managing Director and Chief Executive of Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF), Mrs Maureen Allagoa, has allegedly against global best practices and extant rules of NSITF, approved and paid herself N47 million as gratuity while still in office.

Mrs Allagoa allegedly approved and paid herself the N47m gratuity through an internal memo with a Reference Number: NSITF/AC/I&A/5/S.4/B117 dated 3rd July 2023, from PM, Audit & Inspectorate, routed through AGM, Head, Audit & Inspectorate to the DGM, Head, Audit & Inspectorate.

In the memo titled; "RE: Gratuity Computation for Mrs Maureen Allagoa- (Aa/11272) for the period of service from September 2016 to February 2023 as General Manager and Executive Director respectively;" the MD approved and paid herself gratuity for the

period she served as General Manager and Executive Director, a development that has created tension amongst the management and staff of the agency, with many asking questions on how the computation of this amount was done.

Others question the timing of the payments considering the fact that the Fund is struggling financially.

Further investigation revealed that the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Daju Kachallom is allegedly playing out the script of her former boss, Dr Chris Ngige who though has left the government, still controls Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund through Maureen Allagoa, the current Managing Director, GM Procurement Mr Akin, his procurement director whom he re-engaged from retirement to do his dirty job.

A source in the Audit Office who spoke in confidence queried the rationale of re-engaging people who retired from active service in NSITF by the former Minister.

He said: "Sadly too, the Managing Director, Mrs Allagoa, Executive Management and Board Secretary didn't see the reason to question such action that is in sharp contrast with labour laws. Instead all they are interested in is paying themselves gratuity while still in service.

"How do you go to people's private houses and market places and then bring them to NSITF and then employ them as AGM, DGM, and GM without regard for the conditions of service and other extant laws? Isn't that sickening?"

Recall that the former minister, Dr. Chris Ngige tried by all means to shield the former Managing Director of the Agency, Dr. Michael Akabuogu, another of his

stooges even with overwhelming cases of corruption and incompetence against him, until he was sacked by Former President Muhammadu Buhari over incompetence and NYSC certificate forgery.

Reacting to the development, one of the union leaders who spoke to us anonymously expressed concern about the rot in the agency since the time of Barr. Somefun, Dr. Michael Akabuogu, and the current MD, Mrs Maureen Allagoa.

"How can you explain NSITF being robbed of billions of naira through mindless contracts under the supervision of the Permanent Secretary of Labour, thereby wasting NSITF resources?"

Is it not strange that the MD paid herself 47 million naira as gratuity while still in office? And in other establishments, there are embargos on contract awards and payment but not

so in NSITF because the current leadership seems to be enjoying immunity from a higher power."

"NSITF must be rescued from the mindless grip of this current management who are still taking instruction and reporting to Dr. Chris Ngige. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu should come to the aid of this organisation before it collapses. Our union leaders are daily blackmailed because the Presidency is being kept in the dark about this mind-blowing fraud in the Fund.

"The Permanent Secretary should protect the interest of over 5,000 staff of the organisation not the greed of former Minister of Labour, who is hellbent on killing NSITF.

"Tell management to stop harassing our union leaders. We need to protect our means of livelihood that is the reason for this outcry. Let NSITF breathe, don't kill it", he concluded.

Gov Mutfwang celebrates Senate Minority leader Simon Mwadkwon on his birthday

By Golok Nanmwa, Jos

Executive Governor of Plateau State Barr Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang, has joined numerous Nigerians to rejoice with Senate Minority Leader Simon Mwadkwon, on his birthday anniversary.

Governor Mutfwang, in a congratulatory message, signed by Bere Gyang his director of press and public affairs described Mwadkwon as a thoroughbred politician who has served Plateau and Nigeria

judiciously, beginning from the House of Representatives from where he got elevated by his constituents to the Senate.

He said Mwadkwon has been a grassroots mobilizer and a down to earth personality always ready and prompt to stand in line with the wishes, aspirations and belief of his people geared towards improving their living condition.

The Governor urged the Senate Minority Leader to

continue with the good works of legislative business by initiating quality legislations that would have positive impact on Plateau people and Nigerians as a whole.

While wishing Sen. Mwadkwon a happy and glorious birthday on behalf of the peace-loving people of Plateau, Governor Mutfwang prayed for God's continuous guidance, wisdom, strength and sufficient grace as he continues to serve God and humanity.



Tinubu meets with Abdullahi Adamu, Omisore at Aso Villa

By Lanre Oloyede

President Bola Tinubu has held a meeting with Abdullahi Adamu, former national chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), and Iyiola Omisore, the party's former national secretary, at the presidential villa in Abuja.

Both men, who arrived together for the meeting, were seen exiting after the session at about 1.30pm on Tuesday.

Adamu and Omisore were said to have quit their roles a week ago, following a meeting of the APC national working committee (NWC).

The Cable had reported how the failure of Adamu to account for over N30 billion from the sale of nomination forms, became the "last straw" that led to his ouster.

Omisore had also been accused of mismanaging funds meant for campaigns

in Osun state.

The resignations of both men fuelled reports of upheaval within the party. However, the APC dismissed the insinuations as speculative.

Abubakar Kyari has since assumed office as acting chairman and Festus Fuanter as the acting national secretary.

While Abdullahi Ganduje, former governor of Kano, has been mentioned as President Tinubu's preferred candidate for the national chairmanship position, Gboyega Oyetola, former governor of Osun, and Ajibola Basiru, former spokesperson of the senate, have been reported to be in the running for the national secretary office.

Adamu had earlier indicated that he would consult with Tinubu before commenting on his alleged resignation.

As at the time of filing this report, there has been no official communication regarding the visit.



Adamu

Tinubu

APC Chairmen endorse Ganduje for party National Chairman

By Lanre Oloyede

The Forum of Ward Chairmen of the All Progressives Congress (APC) has endorsed the immediate past Governor of Kano State, Senator Abdullahi Ganduje, for the position of National Chairman of the party.

Nigerian Pilot reports that the endorsement was announced by the Director General of the Forum, Hon. Yakubu Ishaya, at a press conference in Abuja on Tuesday.

Ishaya said the forum unanimously endorsed

Ganduje because he possesses all the qualities desired of a politician to fit in as APC National Chairman.

He described Ganduje as a man of conscience who is responsible for most infrastructural development of Kano State.

The chairmen were of the opinion that Ganduje being a party man, who contributed significantly to the victory of President Bola Tinubu, believes in the ideology of Mr President and remains the best party man to step into the office as the

National Chairman of APC.

Hon. Ishaya noted that the party should not be at variance with President Tinubu if it must make headway as a ruling party and a seating government.

The Director General posited that the APC is too sensitive to be left without a National Chairman, especially at this crucial time when the government is just being formed.

The Forum appreciated the Progressives Governors' Forum for its effort in ensuring a repositioned APC through

recommendations and attestation of Ganduje as the next National Chairman.

The forum also appealed to President Tinubu to endorse Abdullahi Ganduje as National Chairman of the party for a better tomorrow.

"Today, we, the grassroot Chairmen of the Party, unanimously endorsed His Excellency, Alhaji Abdullahi Ganduje, the immediate past Governor of Kano State as APC National Chairman.

"Ganduje has distinguished

himself over the years. From being a civil servant, he became a local government chairman and subsequently elected Governor of Kano State" Hon. Ishaya said.

"It is indeed, an era of new beginning where the party must get it right or risk our continuous stay in power. We are grateful to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the leader of the APC worldwide and appeal to him to whole heartedly endorse Abdullahi Ganduje as National Chairman of our party for a better tomorrow," he added.

APC National Chair: Support Ganduje, Stakeholders' Forum urges Tinubu

By Lanre Oloyede

Yusuf Gwamna, the National Coordinator of All Progressives Congress Critical Stakeholders' Forum has appealed to President Bola Tinubu to support Senator Abdullahi Ganduje emerge the next National Chairman of the party.

The group made the call at a media parley in Abuja, on Tuesday.

As critical stakeholders who believe in the manifesto and ideology of APC, the Forum observed that, "this is the best time to get things right with a complete

party man as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Asiwaju Bola Anmed Tinubu, and our national leader".

"We advice Mr. President to fix the ruling party in the right direction by supporting Dr Abdullahi Umar Ganduje as Adamu's replacement as National Chairman of the Party.

"The APC desires an uncompromising personality who understands the workings of government, and can ensure implementation of its manifesto for the general development of Nigeria.

"We are convinced that with

Abdullahi Ganduje as the National Chairman, Nigerians shall see true progress in government and leadership skills of an ideal governing party" Gwamna said.

The group hinted that the achievement of Ganduje as the Governor of Kano State is well documented, adding he was able to transform the State and made it an infrastructural hub in Nigeria.

"Kano State under Ganduje is the only state in the North West of Nigeria devoid of terrorism and banditry, yet, it has the highest population in the country with 44 Local Government

Areas, the group said.

Gwamna stated that the time to reposition the APC for greatness has come, stressing that the party has strived to survive after its successful victory against the then incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan.

"We firmly believe that the APC is the only national party in Nigeria, which believes in competence, credibility and dedicated service.

"Since the inception of the party, it has been bedeviled with leadership crises ranging from the unceremonious exit of H.E John Odigie Oyeogun, to the sacking of

Comrade Adams Oshiomhole's National Working Committee, followed by various factional National Chairmen.

"The appointment of Caretaker/ Convention Extra-ordinary Planning Committee and then the emergence of Senator Abdullahi Adamu as National Chairman and his sudden resignation" the group noted.

However, the group has appealed to the Progressives Governors Forum to continue to advocate for credible leadership of the party and give its unalloyed support for Ganduje as the National Chairman of APC.

Call your supporters to order, INEC charges parties in Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi

By Agency Report

Ahead of the November 11 Governorship Elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi states, the Independent National Electoral Commission INEC has expressed grave concern about the increasing cases of pre-election violence by political parties, urging them to call their supporters to order.

INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu gave the charge on Tuesday

in Abuja at its election quarterly review meeting with political parties.

He said, "As we review the general election, we also need to focus our attention on the forthcoming bye-elections and the three off-cycle Governorship elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi States. For the Commission, we are looking at some of the lessons learnt from the general election to improve our performance in the forthcoming elections.

"We are focusing, among other

issues, on election technology, recruitment and training of ad hoc staff, the conduct of some of our regular and ad hoc officials, security issue, and logistics in particular and our relationship with other service providers in general. I also appeal to party leaders for similar introspection on the conduct of your candidates and their supporters. The use of thugs during elections to harass election officials, intimidate voters and disrupt processes, sometimes resulting in the

destruction of election materials or even worse must be addressed. Campaign in public by parties and candidates in the three States commenced on 14th July 2023 as provided in the Timetable and Schedule of Activities for the Governorship elections. Sadly, there are already disturbing reports of clashes between opposing parties with claims and counter claims of innocence or culpability. These claims help no one. Call your supporters to order.

"At the same time, I must also

acknowledge the perennial complaints from some political parties that the power of incumbency is used in some States to restrain some parties and candidates from access to public facilities for media campaigns and outdoor advertising through exorbitant fees or outright denial. This often leads to the mutual destruction of advertising materials such as billboards, resulting in altercation and violence involving supporters of opposing political parties".

Politics

Fuel subsidy: Roll out mass transit buses to tackle worsening hardship, Onaiwu tells Govs

By Agency Report

The founding Director General of the Nigeria Governors Forum, Earl Osaro Onaiwu, has urged the 36 state governors to respond quickly to the severe hardship caused by the federal government's removal of fuel subsidy.



Onaiwu

Onaiwu said the state government can no longer rely on monthly allocations.

In a statement he issued on Tuesday in Abuja, he said, "The most logical

next step is for state governors to deploy at least 200 buses to alleviate the exorbitant cost of daily transportation commuters'

encounter inside the state.

"While bus service will not be free, the return to the previous cost of transportation before the President announced the withdrawal of subsidies will go a long way toward alleviating the pain of the masses."

Onaiwu told the governors to collaborate with over six indigenous vehicle manufacturing companies as well as their foreign counterparts in Nigeria to achieve this goal, noting that public transit

can be fueled by gasoline, diesel, or electricity.

According to him, "Indeed, renewable energy-powered transportation will open up new economic opportunities. Nigeria would thereby become a significant participant in cleaner energy research, transportation, and supporting infrastructure such as repair centres and charging stations.

"We need to take some burdens off people's shoulders, and we can do so by providing cheaper

mass transit. Each state may expect to deploy at least 200 buses in the next two years.

"It is more strategic and makes more economic sense than government giveaways disguised as cash transfers," he said.

He said that the intervention of the state government has become necessary and that if they act as advised, the confidence deficit between the populace and their individual leaders would be reduced.

Governor Sani signs Executive Order on Financial Inclusion in Kaduna

By Our Correspondent

As part of efforts to cushion the negative impact of petrol subsidy removal on the citizens, Governor Uba Sani of Kaduna State has signed an Executive Order on financial inclusion for one million poor and vulnerable persons across the state.

Speaking during the signing of the executive order in his office, Governor Sani explained that the aim is pursuant to the state government's efforts to address the exclusion of about 2.1 million poor, underserved and vulnerable citizens in the rural areas from financial

services, and to ensure they benefit from the state and Federal Government's Social Intervention Programmes.

The governor disclosed that a committee comprising government officials, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and financial technology companies will develop a state financial strategy to drive the social intervention programme.

According to him, about one million poor and unbanked citizens are expected to be included in the financial services sector in the next year, while the state government will consult with

key stakeholders including traditional rulers, religious leaders and local government chairmen to ensure mass sensitisation and involvement of the citizens in the financial inclusion drive.

While lamenting that over 75 per cent of people in the North-West zone were financially excluded and unbanked, the governor lamented that the majority of such people were deprived of the opportunity to benefit from the various social intervention programmes during the administration of former President Muhammadu Buhari due to lack of financial inclusion.



Otti swears in more Special Advisers, urges them to serve with honesty

By Our Correspondent

Governor Alex Otti on Tuesday inaugurated more special advisers with a charge for them to align themselves with the highest standard of governance enunciated by the present administration.

Speaking after the administration of the Oath

of Office and Allegiance on the aides, including Mr. Ugochukwu Okoroafor, Special Adviser, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Hon. Iheanacho Obioma, Special Adviser, Political Affairs by the Solicitor General of the State, Lady Uzoamaka Ikonne, the Governor stressed the need for

them to remain faithful to their Oath of Office.

Governor Otti said they were not appointed for self-glory but expected to bring their wealth of experience to bear to serve the state with honesty and sincerity.

He urged them to drive the agenda of the administration,

which focuses on poverty alleviation, access to education, and good road infrastructure among others, adding that they should assist in ensuring that his campaign promises were fulfilled.

Responding on behalf of his colleague, the Special Adviser, Monitoring and Evaluation, Mr.

Ugochukwu Okoroafor said they know what the Governor has gone through in his quest to serve Abia and pledged to assist him achieve his goal of taking Abia from darkness to light and lifting the people from poverty.

Wike, Makinde Monitoring Judges for Tinubu

By Agency Report

As if justifying the claims that there are plans to compromise the judiciary, Phrank Shaibu, the Special Assistant on Public Communication to Atiku Abubakar has lambasted former Rivers State governor, Nyesom Wike and Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State for constantly monitoring and spying on judges even as the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal winds down.

Last week, Atiku in a statement raised the alarm that there are plans to compromise the judiciary ahead of the judgement of the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal. The Presidency and the All Progressives Congress (APC) debunked the allegation by Atiku.

But in a statement yesterday, Shaibu said it was curious that Wike and Makinde both travelled to Plateau State to

attend a memorial service hosted by the President of the Appeal Court, Justice Monica Dongban-Mensem, even though they were reportedly not invited.

He explained that the event ordinarily was supposed to be a solemn service, "but our busybody interlopers polluted the event with their shameful appearance."

Atiku's aide further added that, "Wike had been using dubious means to cosy up to judges and had been giving them gifts under the guise of welfare."

He argued that Wike's latest visit to an event hosted by the Appeal Court President could be another ruse to influence the appellate court where the current tribunal judges are from.

Shaibu noted that the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Olukayode Ariwoola, made a Freudian

slip a few months ago when he claimed he was happy that Governor Makinde was a member of the renegade governors known as the G5.

Hestated: "Governor Caleb Mutfwang of Plateau State as the host governor, was invited for the programme, but Wike and Makinde were gate crashers at that event. The reason is not far-fetched. They have continued to cosy up to judges just to impress their paymaster."

"Unfortunately, the CJN, Justice Ariwoola, has also failed to live above suspicion. He was in Rivers State ahead of the election, where he said he was happy that Governor Makinde was a member of G5. Then, at the commissioning of the Oyo Governor's lodge in Abuja on May 25, the CJN once again was the special guest of Governor Makinde.

Today, there are rumours that the next attorney-general will be a kinsman of the CJN as part of efforts to manipulate the outcome of the election petition tribunal. While this has not been proven, the fact remains that the CJN has put himself in a position where his integrity is constantly questioned."

Shaibu maintained that Senator Adamu Bulkachuwa's confession that he convinced his wife, Justice Zainab Bulkachuwa – a former Appeal Court President – to grant some favours to his colleagues in the Senate had vindicated Atiku.

He added: "In 2019, we asked the President of the Court of Appeal, Justice Zainab Bulkachuwa, to recuse herself because of conflict of interest since her husband was an APC

senator. This same APC said we were crying wolf where there was none.

"Four years later, we were vindicated after Senator Bulkachuwa himself on the floor of the Senate admitted that his wife granted favours to some of his colleagues. Our suspicions are never wrong."

"Governor Wike continually feels too familiar with judges because his wife is one. He gives judges gifts in the name of welfare. This is ironic given the fact that this is a man who does not believe in the rule of law."

"We hereby call the attention of Nigerians to the clandestine and surreptitious moves of Governor Makinde and Wike who is seeking to impress Tinubu because of a protection and ministerial appointment that will be short-lived."

Lamidi Apapa asks court to compel IG to evict Abure from LP National Secretariat

By Agency report

Alhaji Lamidi Apapa, the acting National Chairman of the Labour Party (LP), has prayed a Federal High Court, Abuja, to compel the Inspector-General (I-G) of Police to eject the embattled LP National Chairman, Julius Abure, from the party's national secretariat.

Apapa, in a fresh suit filed before Justice Ahmed Mohammed, also sought an order of perpetual injunction restraining Abure and three other suspended national officers from further representing or parading themselves as national chairman and officers of the party.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that Apapa; Alhaji Lawal Saleh, acting National Secretary; Comrade Anslem Eragbe, National Youth Leader and LP are the 1st to 4th plaintiffs in the suit marked: FHC/ABJ/CS/777/23 and filed by their lawyer, Anderson Asamota.

The plaintiffs had sued Mr Abure as suspended National Chairman; Farouk Umaru, suspended National Secretary; Ojukwu Clement, suspended Organising Secretary; Oluci Opara, suspended National Treasurer and I-G as 1st to 5th defendants respectively.

In the latest case dated June 1, the plaintiffs sought nine reliefs which include "an order setting aside or nullifying all steps or proceedings conducted by the 1st to 4th defendants, actions or decisions taken, documents or correspondences prepared, authored, signed and issued by them, after they were restrained by the FCT High Court on April 5th and suspended by the National Executive Council (NEC) of the Labour Party on 3rd day of May, 2023.

"An order of mandatory injunction directing or compelling the 1st to 4th defendants whether acting by themselves or through their officers, privies, representatives, attorneys and/or agents to render account of all monies or funds received by them through gift, donations, contributions for and on behalf of the party and return or refund all the monies or gift received by them for and on behalf of the party."

The plaintiff, who prayed the court to eject Abure and the three co-defendants from the party's national secretariat located at No. 2, IBM Haruna Street, Utako, Abuja, described them as "illegal occupants."

They sought a declaration



Lamidi Apapa

that by virtue of Articles 13 (2) (B)(xvii), 17(ii) and 19(2) (C) & (3)C of the Constitution of the Labour Party, 2019 (as amended), the NEC of the LP is empowered and/or inundated with powers to take disciplinary action or discipline the erring members and national officers of the party for misconduct.

They said that by the constitution of the party, Abure, having been suspended by the NEC cannot continue to hold himself out as the national chairman of the party, "which is privilege only enjoyed by members of the party," among other reliefs.

In the affidavit deposed to by Eragbe, he said an FCT High Court on April 5 restrained the 1st to 4th defendants parading themselves as national chairman and national officers of the party.

He averred that despite the said restraining order "hanging over their necks like the sword of Damocles," they continued to parade themselves as national officers of the party in various fora and meetings in flagrant disobedience of the order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

Based on this, Eragbe said the NEC, in its meeting held on May 3, reached a resolution suspending the four of them.

He said the decision was based on their "numerous acts of contempt of the FCT High Court restraining order, convening, holding and participating in illegal NEC meeting on April 18 in Asaba, Delta.

He also said it was for their involvement in fraudulent activities and anti-party activities especially as it appertains to the conduct of pseudo gubernatorial primaries in Imo State, Bayelsa State and Kogi State on 15th April, 2023.

"That the 1st to 4th

defendants conducted, presided and superintended the said pseudo or illegal primaries in Imo, Bayelsa and Kogi State on 15th April 2023 in contempt of the restraining order of the FCT High Court referenced above."

When the matter was called on Monday, Asamota, who appeared for the plaintiffs, told the court that the matter was slated for mention and all the defendants had been duly served.

He then prayed the court to adjourn the matter for hearing.

But Kehinde Edun, a lawyer who represented the suspended National Secretary, Umaru, said Abure, Clement and Opara had not been served with the court papers which necessitated their not being represented in court.

Justice Mohammed, therefore, directed the court registrar to crosscheck from the record if all the defendants were served, but the registrar confirmed that only Abure (1st defendant) was served with a hearing notice.

The judge, who adjourned the matter until Nov. 28 for further mention, ordered that the originating summons and hearing notices be served on all the necessary parties.

Bayelsa APC leaders deny calling for sack of Amnesty Boss

By Our Correspondent

Leaders of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Bayelsa State have denied allegations of demanding for the sack of the Interim Administrator of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), Maj-Gen, Barry Ndiomu (Rtd).

A former member of the National Assembly, Senator John Brambafia while speaking on behalf of the forum during a press conference held in Yenagoa, stated that those behind the call were not members of the APC Elders Forum in the state, and do not exist in any form.

He alleged that the non-existing group was sponsored to carry out the hatchet job because of the

self-inflicting pain they are going through, and decided to make Ndiomu their target while playing the victim.

Countering the allegations by the media organization, Brambafia condemned the nebulous reasons the faceless group gave for seeking the sack of the amnesty boss

He said: "We wish to state unequivocally and unambiguously that there was no time the APC Elders forum in Bayelsa State took a decision to call for the sack of the Interim Administrator of the Presidential Amnesty Programme, as they always form an integral part of the various fora that make up the party in the state", Brambafia said.

Adding: "The members of APC in Bayelsa West Senatorial District maintain that the

present PAP helmsman has created far-reaching impacts in the programme and has contributed significantly to the improvement of the party in the state with the sound reform measures so far taken to reposition the programme that was gradually cascading to a moribund state.

"The APC members express shock over the show of ingratitude by such a pseudo platform, as they failed to appreciate the progressive ideas initiated and implemented by the Interim Administrator to revamp the interventionist agency."

The Bayelsa APC elders maintained that they were proud of the achievements of Ndiomu in only 10 months in office and will continue to support him to succeed.

They particularly

commended his effort in introducing worthy and creative ideas like the Cooperative Scheme for ex-agitators, noting that it will produce the desired result for the benefit of all Niger Delta people.

According to the Bayelsa West APC stakeholders, "the establishment of a Cooperative Society will encourage hard work and agitators, which is in common work and deepen the rehabilitation and reintegration of the ex-agitators which is in consonance with the original intention of the programme.

"We therefore call on the APC-led federal government and the general public to disregard the said malicious news item, as it was borne out of insatiable appetite and greed for personal

gains and deliberate show of discontentment towards the phenomenal improvement of the activities of the agency following the reform measures undertaken by the present Interim Administrator of the programme.

"We also use this medium to express our total support for the reform measures designed to reinvigorate the activities of the Presidential Amnesty Programme and, as a result, call on the federal government to retain the appointment of Major General Barry Tariye Ndiomu as the head of PAP in order to complete the ongoing reforms that will encourage multiplier effect in the Niger Delta with the concomitant peace that follows", he stated.

Adeleke calls for calm as protest rocks Osun Poly

By Our Correspondent

The governor stated this on Tuesday in a press statement signed by the Commissioner for Information and Public Enlightenment, Oluomo Kolapo Alimi.

Osun State Governor, Senator Ademola Adeleke, has called on members of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) in the state, protesting the recent suspension of the Rector, Dr Tajudeen Adewale Adetayo, to be calm and not allow themselves to be used by the opposition party.

The governor stated this on Tuesday in a press statement

signed by the Commissioner for Information and Public Enlightenment, Oluomo Kolapo Alimi.

Assuring the ASUP and the students of the institution that the matter will be looked into and necessary measures taken, the governor urged them to shun the protest which had led to closing the school gate, thereby disrupting the ongoing examination.

"The OSPOLY Governing Board will soon be put in place to take over the matter and investigate the allegation which led to the suspension and take appropriate action as soon as possible," Adeleke stated.

"I understand the reason for the protest over the suspension of the Rector, Dr Tajudeen Adewale Adetayo. The step taken by the administration is necessary, but I assure you that full investigation will commence, and every misunderstanding will be cleared.

"I recognize the ASUP and I urge them to stop the protest, and allow the investigation to hold for the matter to be sorted. Please do not allow yourself to be used by the opposition. You are important to the Government and the public. Please stop the protest and allow peace to be restored to the school community."



Pastor at kidnapped US girl's funeral in 1975 charged with her murder



A retired US church pastor who presided nearly half a century ago at the funeral of a kidnapped eight-year-old girl has been charged with her murder.

Gretchen Harrington went missing in the Philadelphia suburb of Marple Township on the morning of 15 August 1975 while attending summer Bible camp.

Earlier this year, an anonymous woman told investigators she believed her best friend's father was the culprit.

David Zandstra, 83, is now charged with murder and kidnapping of a minor.

"He is every parent's worst nightmare," Delaware County District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer told reporters on Monday.

"He killed this poor eight-year-old girl he knew and who trusted him. And then, he acted as if he was a family friend, not only during her burial and the period after that, but for years."

Interest in the case was revived in part by a book published last year, called Marple's Gretchen Harrington

Tragedy: Kidnapping, Murder and Innocence Lost in Suburban Philadelphia.

In 1975, Mr Zandstra was pastor at the Trinity Christian Reformed Church. Bible camps were held on its premises each morning and he would then transport the children to a second church.

But Gretchen never showed up at the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and it was Mr Zandstra himself who reported her disappearance to police that morning.

Her remains would be found in a nearby wooded area nearly two months later.

The suspect was a family friend of the Harringtons, helped search for her and even presided over the child's funeral, sources told CBS News, the BBC's US partner.

Investigators say Mr Zandstra had invited Gretchen into his car once she was out of view of her late father, who had watched her walk up the road from the family home.

A witness interviewed soon afterwards reported seeing the girl speak to the driver of a vehicle similar to Mr Zandstra's

green Rambler station wagon.

But when interviewed by police at the time, the pastor denied having seen Gretchen that day.

In January this year, investigators spoke with the best friend of Mr Zandstra's daughter.

She told them she often slept over at their house and, at age 10, once woke to find the pastor groping her.

The woman also showed police a 1975 diary entry in which she wrote: "I think he might be the one who kidnapped Gretchen. I think it was Mr Z."

Mr Zandstra moved several times, living in California and Texas before his arrest last week in Georgia by Pennsylvania State Police, at which point police say he confessed to the crime.

The suspect is being held in a local jail and is due to be extradited to Pennsylvania.

Joanna Falcone Sullivan, who wrote Marple's Gretchen Harrington Tragedy, told the BBC she believes her book with co-author Mike Mathis helped surface new leads.



The writer said they interviewed Mr Zandstra for the book and he "sounded like he didn't remember everything that transpired that morning. His wife remembered a lot better."

"We kind of chalked it up to age," Mrs Sullivan said.

She added: "The story has affected the community so much."

"This crime still comes up in the Facebook neighbourhood groups."

The state trooper to whom police say Mr Zandstra confessed his crime said on Monday the suspect seemed relieved.

"I don't know if he's sorry for what he did, but this is a weight off his shoulders for sure," Eugene Tray said.

In a statement, the Harrington family said the arrest felt like "one step closer to justice."

"If you met Gretchen, you were instantly her friend. She exuded kindness to all and was sweet and gentle," they wrote.

"Even now, when people share their memories of her, the first thing they talk about is how amazing she was and still is... at just eight years old, she had a lifelong impact on those around her."

Arsenal to rival Chelsea for Michael Olise

SPORTS



FIFA Women's World Cup: Falcons bank on winning mentality to beat Australia

Women World Cup: Australia will not roll-over Nigeria – Super Falcons

Sports

NFF President spurs Super Falcons to 'keep Africa's hope alive'

President of Nigeria Football Federation, Ibrahim Gusau has charged the Super Falcons to "keep Africa's hope alive" when they take on co-hosts Australia in their second match of the FIFA Women's World Cup finals on Thursday.

With the first round of matches over on Tuesday, Nigeria is the only African flag-bearer yet to taste defeat.

"As nine-time champions of Africa, and one of only seven countries to have played in every edition of the FIFA Women's World Cup, Nigeria is the real giant and hope of the African continent in Australia. While we expect Morocco, Zambia and South Africa to turn things around in their next matches, my message is that the Super Falcons must focus hard on the ball against the Australians in order to keep Africa's song going.

"We had an impressive game against Canada, but I want the girls to put that feat out of their minds and focus on the three points against Australia. It can be done," Gusau said.

Zambia lost 0-5 to Japan while South Africa were edged 1-2 by Sweden, and Morocco fell 0-6 to Germany in the first round of matches.

"I am charging the girls to go all out. This is a match in which we need to score goals."

FIFA Women World Cup: We are ready to take on Kerr-less Australia- Ajibade

Super Falcons forward Rasheedat Ajibade is confident that Nigeria will get a good result when they play Australia in their second game of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Nine-time African champions Nigeria picked a hard-fought point from their first game against Canada.

It was a spirited performance from Randy Waldrum's ladies as they put up a defensive masterclass to ensure it ended goalless at the Melbourne Rectangular Stadium.

The Super Falcons still have all to fight for, as they square off against Australia at the Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane. It is expected to be a tough game for Nigeria as the Matildas are thirty places above them in the FIFA rankings. They are also full of confidence after defeating the Republic of Ireland in their opening fixture.

However, what counts in the Super Falcons' favour is that Australia have never gone past the quarterfinals of the World Cup. Also, they will be without their star attacker Sam Kerr.

Atletico Madrid Femeni striker Ajibade is aware that Australia will be tough customers. Still, she believes that the Super Falcons can get a good result.

"It's going to be a difficult game playing against the host country in a very big stadium against a huge crowd.

"We are going to play against a lot of factors, but we've got this. We have done it against big teams, so I trust the whole team.

"Also, We have the capacity, we have the energy, we have the talent, and we have the strength. We just have to bring out our A-game."

FIFA Women's World Cup: Falcons on winning mentality to beat



By Asuelimen Osasuyi

Nigeria and Australia will set alight the Lang Park in Brisbane/Meaanjin on Thursday night in what is one of the most-anticipated clashes of the group stage at this ninth edition of the FIFA Women's World Cup finals.

With the maximum three points from their opening match against Republic of Ireland in Sydney on 20 July, the Matildas know they have a fight on their hands against nine-time African champions, Super Falcons, who refused to bow to Olympic champions Canada in Melbourne the following day.

The Super Falcons know only a win will be good enough to stand them in good stead for a place in the Round of 16, as only the two top-placed teams in each of the eight groups will make progress in a tournament that has welcomed 32 teams for the first time ever.

"Of course, it is the World Cup. You have to accept the fact that you are going to play the best teams in the world and you have to be alive to that responsibility and face it with your full chest," team captain Onome Ebi told thenff.com after the tournament draw that was conducted in Auckland, New Zealand in October 2022.

On Tuesday, Ebi reiterated the position of the Super Falcons: "We will go in there and play to win. There are no two ways about it. Only three points will be good enough for us."

Ebi says their five-match unbeaten streak is one of the callipers that will keep the girls going strong on a turf much more familiar to their opponents and in front of dozens of thousands of a partisan crowd at the Lang Park.

Before the draw with Canada, the Super Falcons had pipped Costa Rica 1-0, edged Haiti 2-1, trounced New Zealand 3-0 and slayed Lions Women's Football Club 8-1 before the World Cup.

Nigeria is one of only seven countries (the others being USA, Brazil, Germany, Sweden, Japan and Norway) to have featured in every single edition of the FIFA Women's World Cup finals since the competition was launched in 1991. Australia missed the inaugural edition in

China, but have been at every other final tournament since then.

Goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie has returned to training after being excused for one day following the MVP-winning performance against Canada in Melbourne, and consistency is expected in the selection of the rearguard, with Michelle Alozie and Ashley Plumtre on the wings, and veteran Osinachi Ohale and youthful Oluwatosin Demehin at central.

The co-hosts will have to do without their talismanic captain Sam Kerr, who has been the

Women World Cup: Australia will not roll-over Nigeria – Super Falcons

By Afolabi Johnson

Super Falcons forward Ifeanyi Onumonu has said Australia will not roll over Nigeria when both sides meet in decisive second group match on Thursday in Brisbane to determine who goes into the knockout stage.

Super Falcons surprised football followers across the globe after they held Canada to a goalless draw in the opening group match.

Host, Australia has to rely on penalty to edge debutant the Republic of Ireland in their opening match.

"In this group, every game is going to be hard, I think watching the Australian game with Ireland they put up a good fight and ended up winning with a penalty.

"So it's not as clear cut as some

thought it might be", she told NFF TV.

Meanwhile, Falcons striker Rasheedat Ajibade who missed the opener against Canada said she will give 100% input into the match. "No doubt the match against the hosts will be tough but we are ready and we cannot be intimidated" She enthused while x-raying the forthcoming match in a chat with nff.tv.

Super Falcons coach Randy Waldrum had earlier expressed delight at having the two ladies back on eligibility list thus giving him wider choice and room to fortify the team to face Matildas of Australia. With just a point in the kitty Falcons will need at least a win and a draw to stand a chance of advancing to the knock out stage.

The team crashed out in the round of 16 at the last edition in France and is hoping to go beyond that on one hand and better their best 1999 quarterfinal record on the other.

Sports

ons bank Australia



Chukwueze to earn €4m per year at AC Milan

Nigerian winger Samuel Chukwueze will reportedly earn €4 million per year when he completes his move from Villarreal to AC Milan this summer.

This represents almost a 300 percent increment of the €1.1 million annual salary he reportedly earns at Villarreal, his boyhood

club. This also means that Samuel Chukwueze will become one of the highest-paid players at the Italian Serie A giants according to Tutto Napoli.

Though Villarreal and AC Milan have agreed on a €28 million transfer fee, which includes €20 million fixed payment and €8 million in bonuses, Chukwueze's transfer to AC Milan is subject to a successful medical examination.

The 24-year-old Nigeria international who has accepted a 5-year stay at AC Milan is expected to undergo his medical today, July 25.

According to Sky Sport Italia, there are only a few minor administrative tasks that need to be done in the next few hours before the Italian giants can announce his arrival.

Chukwueze's current Villarreal contract was due to expire at the end of next season, therefore there was additional motivation to complete the deal as fast as possible. However, extra caution will be needed during the transfer process because he does not possess an EU passport due to his position as a Nigerian international.

CAF Confederation Cup: Rivers United drawn, Bendel Insurance face tough test

Rivers United have been drawn in the first preliminary round of the CAF Confederation Cup.

The Port Harcourt club earned the slot following their impressive performance in Africa's second tier club competition last season.

Rivers United were eliminated at the quarter-final stage by Tanzania's Simba SC last term.

Stanley Eguma's side will face the winner of the tie between Etoile Filante of Burkina Faso and Senegal's Ziguinchor for a slot in the group stage.

Bendel Insurance, Nigeria's other representatives in the competition face a tough hurdle in their bid to make it to the group stage.

The Benin Arsenal will keep a date with ASO Chlef of Algeria in the first round.

If the Nigeria Federation Cup champions scale through, they will face former champions RS Berkane in the second round.

This is the first time Bendel Insurance will be taking part in the competition.

face on most advertisements pertaining to the tournament here.

Antithetically, Nigeria has gained with the return of the fabulous Rasheedat Ajibade – whose goal against Cameroon in the Women Africa Cup of Nations' quarter-finals secured Nigeria's passage to these finals – and midfield battering ram Halimatu Ayinde from suspension.

Asisat Oshoala, who suffered a knock against the Canadians, could be excused, with Nigeria sufficiently blessed in Desire Oparanozie, Jennifer Echegini, Gift Monday and Uchenna Kanu.

Benin Republic will fight Nigeria, South Africa for 2026 World Cup -Rohr

By Afolabi Johnson

Former Super Eagles handler, Genot Rohr has spoken of his plans for the 2026 FIFA World Cup with Benin Republic who are drawn against Nigeria and four others.

Rohr also revealed his teams first two opponents to be South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Now in charge of Benin Republic, Rohr has acknowledged the demands of being in Group C as he attempts an historic first World Cup qualification for the West African country.

Genot Rohr said "I can even say that Group C is the most demanding group because the two great footballing nations of Nigeria and South Africa, who

have World Cup experience, are big chunks. But we are going to join the fight, why not, because there are ten matches, so a mini-championship where everything is possible."

"For the first match against South Africa that we are playing in Cotonou, at home, we will try to play a very good match, like against Senegal. Afterwards, we will go to Zimbabwe, where it is not easy to play. There are only difficult matches, and we are preparing accordingly," the Franco-German Coach said.

The top teams from nine groups will qualify automatically for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, while the four best group runners-up will advance to a playoff to determine the team that will proceed to the inter-confederation play-offs.



Sports



Arsenal to rival Chelsea for Michael Olise

Arsenal have reportedly identified Crystal Palace midfielder Michael Olise as a potential summer transfer target.

On the back of challenging for last season's Premier League title, the Gunners have already made some stellar additions ahead of 2023-24.

Ajax defender Jurrien Timber, West Ham United midfielder Declan Rice and Chelsea forward Kai Havertz have all been signed by the North Londoners.

If reports are to be believed, Mikel Arteta will now have to see some of his squad members depart the Emirates Stadium in order to keep the club on a level footing with FFP.

Nevertheless, despite shelling out in excess of £200 million on just three players, it would come as a surprise if the Spaniard was not able to make further acquisitions before the end of August.

Arsenal are prepared to rival

Chelsea in the race for Olise's signature.

Over the weekend, a number of reports indicated that the Blues were ready to pay in excess of the player's release clause in order to get a deal over the line.

While the France Under-21 international is said to have a £35 million buy-out option in his contract, Chelsea are allegedly prepared to pay in the region of £39 million, presumably in instalments.

Arsenal is in £35m Balogun dilemma

Arsenal have a Folarin Balogun dilemma on their hands as Inter Milan are preparing a £35million bid for the Gunners striker.

Balogun impressed during a loan spell with Stade Reims last season and could provide Mikel Arteta with a valuable option in front of goal should Gabriel Jesus suffer any injury issues this season. But Arsenal could be tempted to cash in on the 22-year-old, even though they currently value him at £50m.



Liverpool agree terms with Lavia

Liverpool have made a breakthrough in their attempts to sign Romeo Lavia after they reportedly agreed personal terms with the player to seal a summer transfer.

According to Belgian journalist Sacha Tavoletti, Lavia had grown a 'little annoyed' that Liverpool were taking so long with their approach. But he's now said to have 'agreed on personal terms' with the Reds

and Liverpool will launch their first bid soon.

Liverpool are reportedly aiming to offer around £35m for the midfielder, which is £15m short of what Southampton have previously been asking for. No formal approach has been made by Liverpool as of yet for the Belgian midfielder and he's been a part of their pre-season schedule this summer.



Man United get Hojlund green light

Manchester United have been given a green light to sign Rasmus Hojlund from Atalanta as the Serie A team have reached an agreement in principle to sign Almeria striker El Bilal Toure, according to transfer guru Fabrizio Romano. Toure, 21, is likely to be Hojlund's replacement, with the Red Devils keen to take Denmark international to Old Trafford this summer.



Man United Kane deal blocked

Manchester United boss Erik ten Hag appears to be having his pursuit of Harry Kane blocked by the Glazer family.

The Glazers are taking funds out of United to pay back the money they borrowed when they originally purchased the club. The money coming out has had a knock-on effect when it comes to Financial Fair Play regulations. And the Red Devils wouldn't be able to afford to pay Kane's transfer fee or wages.

But if the Glazer family sold up and United were taken over by a new backer, the club would be able to sanction a deal for the Premier League's second highest goalscorer in history.



Chelsea reject Gallagher bid

Chelsea have rejected a £40million bid from West Ham for Conor Gallagher.

Gallagher has been linked with a whole host of clubs this summer as the Blues look to cash in on some of their assets after splurging on an array of new faces throughout the last year.

Gallagher is currently in the USA on Chelsea's pre-season tour. And it appears the current bid is not high enough to tempt Blues chiefs into selling.



Man City plan to keep Walker

Manchester City plan to keep Kyle Walker at the Etihad Stadium this summer. The player didn't make it into the Citizens' starting line-up for their Champions League final victory over Inter Milan in June and has been linked with a move away from Manchester this summer.

"We hope Kyle Walker stays with us," explained City boss Pep Guardiola. "I heard comments from [Thomas] Tuchel about Kyle. I will say the same. What I can say he is a very important player for us.

The clubs are in touch, we will fight for him."



BUSINESS & ECONOMY

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Customs boss, Adeniyi

NCS Apapa Port rakes-in N9.2bn in one day, N502bn in 7 months

By Onu Okorie

THE Customs Area Controller of Apapa Command of Nigeria Customs Service NCS, Comptroller Auwal Baba Mohammed has disclosed that the command made a collection of N9.2b on July 20, 2023.

Comptroller Baba Mohammed who made this known in a statement explained that the achievement was the highest daily collection it ever achieved in its existence since the port was established.

While giving breakdown of performance of the Command so far in 2023, the Customs boss said that a total of N502,987,516,219.26 was collected from January 2023 to date and made 16 seizures worth a duty paid value of N1.4 billion within the same period.

He however, urged officers to redouble their efforts in revenue collection, trade facilitating and strict enforcement of anti smuggling activities. He listed the seizures made within the period to comprise prohibited drugs, used tyres, rice, vegetable oil, and sundry items.

He also revealed that the command made a seizure of two pistols inside one groupage cargo, while a suspect is arrested, and the matter is undergoing investigation.

He further explained that the Command under the leadership of Compt. AB

Mohammed has achieved an increased level of compliance by importers, exporters, and their agents through deliberate system profiling and manifest tracking.

Under the CAC's direct supervision, dedicated officers of the command are using the system profiling yardstick to gauge the integrity levels of importers and consignees.

This has helped in treating traders in line with their previous transaction records, which is reassuring that compliance pays through time saving and cost efficiency.

The Controller urged all port users to be complaint and advised that compliant traders are shielded from the risk of getting their consignments seized; imposition of penalties after demand notices and possible arrests for prosecution as the case may require.

According to Comptroller Mohammed, non compliant traders spend more time and money paying for terminal space due to demurrage plus higher cost due to DN's and penalties.

Comptroller Mohammed has also raised the level of electronic manifest tracking to accelerate trade facilitation leveraging on available technology.

The CAC described this feat as a

masterstroke in the journey towards trade facilitation and ease of doing business.

At a recent monthly meeting of Terminal/Unit Heads, Comptroller Mohammed urged all officers of the command to sustain and improve upon the level of discipline the command has been noted for under his watch.

He characterised discipline as the foundation of good work etiquette, such as punctuality, diligent application of Nigeria Customs Service Act (NCSA) 2023 and other noble virtues that align with the law.

He further stressed that Nigeria has high expectations of the NCS and that the service is looking up to Apapa Command for its highest collection.

Compt. AB Mohammed charged officers/men of the Command to use their knowledge of the job and the rules guiding the service to facilitate legitimate trade.

He said, "As we facilitate trade for compliant traders, let's be wary of the possibility of releasing uncustom goods in error or in the guise of facilitating trade

"I hereby charge you to do better in the second half of 2023 as the glory for the successes recorded in the first half belongs to all of us" the CAC said.



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Palma Ileye - Tourism

Business



Danbatta

5G networks will enable new possibilities in telecom services – Danbatta

By Onu Okorie

The Executive Vice Chairman of Nigerian Communication Commission, NCC, Prof. Umar Danbatta has said that the fifth generation network is enabling new possibilities in areas such as autonomous vehicles, augmented reality, and telemedicine.

He made the assertion during the two-day 2023 ICTEL Expo organised by Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) at Landmark Event Centre, Lagos.

With the theme of the event is "Tech Disruption: Transforming Industries with Innovation," the NCC boss added that the convergence of

technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) was disrupting multiple industries, particularly in entertainment, education, and retail.

Danbatta, who was represented by Mr Alkasim Umar, Director, Consumer Affairs Bureau of NCC, said these technologies would shape healthcare, finance, manufacturing and transportation Industries.

Danbatta noted that VR and AR technologies offered immersive and interactive experiences that could transform how we learn, shop, and entertain ourselves.

"As we navigate the era of tech disruptions, it is crucial for businesses to embrace innovation and adapt to

the changing landscape.

"Companies that are agile and willing to experiment with these emerging technologies will gain a competitive advantage in their respective industries.

"In line with our plan, we recognise that the rapid pace of technological advancement is disrupting industries across the globe. Nigeria is no exception," Danbatta said.

He said that the commission's vision was rooted in the belief that embracing this disruption and fostering innovation would propel the nation toward sustainable growth, economic diversification and enhanced living standards for all Nigerians.

Speaking on the the commission's Aspire2024, a strategic management plan (2020 – 2024), he said connectivity and broadband access lie at the heart of the commission's strategic vision plan.

He said that AI-powered algorithms were enabling more accurate predictions, enhanced decision-making and automation of mundane tasks.

According to Danbatta, by using AI to analyse vast amounts of data, businesses can gain valuable insights and optimise their operations to deliver better products and services.

"Another tech disruption that is transforming industries is the

Internet of Things (IoT). With the proliferation of connected devices, IoT is revolutionising how we interact with our surroundings.

"Industries such as agriculture, energy and logistics are leveraging IoT to optimise resource usage, monitor equipment maintenance, and improve overall efficiency.

"IoT-enabled sensors and smart devices provide real-time data, enabling businesses to make informed decisions and optimise their processes," he said.

He added that blockchain technology was another transformative force that was reshaping industries, especially in finance and supply chain management.

The NCC boss said that blockchain created decentralised and immutable ledgers, which ensured transparency, security, and efficiency in transactions.

He explained that the technology had the potential to streamline processes, reduce costs, and eliminate intermediaries, leading to greater trust and collaboration between business partners.

The NCC boss said the commission understood that a robust and pervasive telecommunications infrastructure was vital for driving socio-economics development.

He said that by expanding network coverage and promoting the deployment of broadband infrastructure, the commission was bringing reliable and affordable internet access to every corner of Nigeria.

Danbatta noted that as at May, the number of telecom subscription was 227,179,946 with a teledensity of 119 per cent.

He said the telecom industry also contributed 14.13 per cent in quarter one of 2023 to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

"We are also very particular about consumer protection and privacy. Through our initiatives, we aim to enforce standards, improve service delivery, provide avenues for redress, and promote data privacy, cybersecurity

FPIs rebound as total foreign transactions on NGX hit \$60m

By Kehinde Ibrahim, Lagos

AMID the bounce of a new administration and raft of changes in government policies, foreign portfolio investments (FPIs) appear to be gradually coming back to the economy as total foreign transactions at the floor of the Nigerian Exchange Limited (NGX) grew to \$60.49 million in the month of June 2023.

This is according to the recently released data on domestic and foreign portfolio investment report in Nigeria's equity trading for the month of June 2023. It will be recalled that the total

foreign transactions in the first four months of 2023, stood at N62.18 billion owing to the soaring inflation, prolonged FX scarcity as well as uncertainties building up to the 2023 elections.

However, the report – prepared on a monthly basis by NGX Regulation Limited, with trading figures from market operators on their Domestic and Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) flows, revealed that while total domestic transactions on the exchange stood at N1.306 trillion in six months of 2023, total foreign transactions stood at N145.08 billion in the same period.

The report revealed that the total transactions executed between the current and prior month (May 2023) revealed that total domestic transactions increased by 26.34 per cent from N285.76 billion in May to N361.01 billion in June 2023. Similarly, total foreign transactions increased significantly by 23.09 per cent from N37.16 billion (about \$79.88 million) to N45.74 billion (about \$60.49 million) between May 2023 and June 2023.

The report also revealed that total transactions at the nation's bourse increased by 25.96 per cent from N322.92 billion (about \$693.99 million)

recorded in May 2023 to N406.75 billion (about \$537.87 million) in June 2023. The performance of the current month when compared to the performance in June 2022 (N156.52 billion) revealed that total transactions increased by 159.87 per cent.

Furthermore, the total value of transactions executed by domestic investors outperformed transactions executed by foreign investors by 78 per cent. Domestic inflows and outflows stood at N180.91 billion and N180.11 billion while foreign inflows and outflows stood at N22.72 billion and N23.02 billion.

FCCPC vows to prosecute PoS operators over collaborative price fixing

By Kehinde Ibrahim, Lagos

By Kehinde Ibrahim, Lagos

THE Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), has vowed to prosecute members of the Association of Mobile Money and Bank Agents in Nigeria (AMMBAN) over collaborative service price fixing.

The Executive Vice Chairman of FCCPC, Mr. Babatunde Irukera, in a statement, while reacting to what appeared to be an adamancy and

insistence on a membership-wide implementation of price fixing by AMMBAN, said on Monday, that the prosecution would be in line with the FCCP Act 2018.

He said the Commission in escalating the matter in accordance with the FCCPA had entered an Order and Notice (ONC) of the Commission to AMMBAN, executives, members and non-member PoS operators.

The Order is for the operators to cease and desist from conduct that constituted an infringement of the law.

Irukera said that violation of the

Order of the Commission attracted additional consequences apart from the N10,000,000 for corporate entities charge and N1,000,000 and or a prison sentence of up to three months for individuals.

"The Commission issued an advisory informing and discouraging the association and Point of Sale (PoS) operators from engaging in coordinated or concerted efforts (otherwise known as price-fixing or cartel).

"The advisory is also to stop the association from acting in furtherance of any such coordinated

efforts to uniformly determine changes in price of services they render. The ONC was issued by the Commission and served on AMMBAN. The Commission is by this publicly disseminating the ONC which conveys the Commission's will to enforce the law up to prosecuting violators," he said. "The impunity associated with persisting in a course of action prohibited by law, and clearly forbidden by regulators usually constitutes aggravating factors in determining penalties for illegal conduct," he said.

Nigeria's gas infrastructure requires \$20bn to build – Oando

By Kehinde Ibrahim, Lagos

THE Nigeria's gas infrastructure would require between \$15 billion to \$20 billion to build, says Oando Plc

It, however, added that, government alone would be unable to realise this, calling on the private sector to work with the government to deliver on this.

Advocating a collaboration between the private and public

sectors to unlock Nigeria's Gas Potential, doing so, it added, will guarantee smooth energy transition and sustainable economic development

The deputy group chief executive of Oando Plc, Omamofe Boyo who made the call while delivering a thought-provoking speech on 'Realising Nigeria's Gas Potential: A Private Sector Perspective' at the just concluded NOG Energy Week in Abuja, shared his views on the utilisation of gas for domestic

consumption in Nigeria.

He stated that, although the country has been down this road for over 30 years, it has yet to utilise gas for domestic consumption for a variety of reasons.

Boyo highlighted that Nigeria started a system whereby competing fuels were subsidised, which prevented the market from growing independently, noting that, additionally, Nigeria emphasised earning foreign currency from

gas exportation rather than utilising it domestically.

According to him, the investment and emphasis were put on oil rather than gas, which resulted in the infrastructure carrying oil being prioritised.

Boyo proposed a holistic approach to increasing local consumption and investment in gas, which requires a level playing field and adequate regulatory capacity.

Boyo concluded that Nigeria needs to prioritise harnessing

its gas resources and ensure an enabling environment with clearly defined opportunities for the private sector to fund and work in partnership with the government.

Industry leaders, such as; group chief executive officer of NNPC Limited, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Petroleum Resources, Federal Republic of Nigeria, as well as other energy enthusiasts, were present during Boyo's presentation at the conference.

CIT returns for 2023: FIRS sets August 31 deadline for companies

By Onu Okorie

The Federal Inland Revenue Service FIRS has given all companies whose CIT returns for 2023 year of assessment that fall due between 30th June and 31st August, 2023 (both days inclusive) up to 31st August, 2023 to submit the returns to the Service.

The was part of statement by the Special Assistant to the Executive Chairman, FIRS, (Media & Communication), Johannes Oluwatobi Wojuola, made available to media in Abuja.

According to him, "as a measure of goodwill and in line with relevant provisions of the Companies Income Tax Act, "all companies whose CIT returns for 2023 year of assessment that fall due between 30th June and 31st August, 2023 (both days inclusive) are given up to 31st August, 2023 to submit the returns to the Service."

The FIRS noted that the relevant Companies Income Tax returns will not attract late filing penalties or interests if payments were made on or before 31st August 2023, noting

further that where companies fail to file by the extended date, the penalty and interest for late payment will be computed from the original due date.

"The relevant CIT returns shall, therefore, not attract Late Filing Penalty or interest for late payment if submitted to the Service on or before 31st August 2023.

"Where relevant CIT returns are not filed by the extended date, penalty and interest for late payment shall be computed from the original due date and not the extended date."

The Service also stated that the extension of filing date is only for Companies Income Tax and does not include returns for withholding tax, value added tax, personal income tax (PAYE), among others.

"The Service invites all relevant taxpayers to take the opportunity afforded by this extension to submit their CIT returns within the specified time, pay the taxes due and avoid payment of penalty and interest," the notice read.



Lagos Port

FG flags off free vaccination against Anthrax to ensure safety of humans, livestock

By Palma Ileye

Federal Government in Collaboration with Relevant Stakeholders has flagged off free vaccination against anthrax to ensure safety of livestock as well as prevent the spread of the disease to unaffected animals and human.

The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr. Ernest Afolabi Umakhihe was represented by the Deputy Director Veterinary and Pests Control Services, Dr. Abdulkareem Durosinslorun who was at the Emir's palace with his team in sympathy over the unfortunate diagnosis of Anthrax disease in Niger State.

He noted that anthrax an infectious zoonosis disease, caused by bacteria affects both domestic and wild animals and can also affect human especially those working closely with infected animals.

And to mitigate the effect therefore, he said that Federal Government has deployed 50,000 doses of Anthrax vaccines to the State for the commencement of mass vaccination of all livestock within 12kilometres radius of the farm where the disease was first diagnosed.

Umakhihe revealed that plans were underway to carry out a free anthrax vaccination campaign on other States.

In his words, "we have also placed restrictions of movement on animals within the farm where the outbreak occurred for the next 20 days from the date of the onset of the outbreak.

"This is to ensure that if these animals are infected, they do not infect other animals around them, the farm, its equipment and surroundings will also be thoroughly disinfected while the Ministry will also mount surveillance in slaughter slabs, abattoirs and livestock market around the farm and similar locations in the country to detect the disease early before it spread."

The Permanent Secretary therefore solicited for the cooperation of the people of the Emirate to enable the team (one health concept) carry out all necessary activities to put the outbreak under control, revealing that all in-contact persons have been placed on prophylactic treatment and are being monitored closely.

In his remarks, the Emir of Suleja, His Royal Highness, Mallam Muhammad Awwal commended the Federal Government for its prompt response noting that the outbreak of the disease in his domain came as a shock to him and his Council members.

NPA raises the alarm on extortion at Lagos Port roads

By Kehinde Ibrahim, Lagos

The Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) has raised the alarm over the increasing extortion along the access roads of the Lagos and Tin Can Island Port Complexes.

This is coming on the heels of the clearance operations the Authority undertook on July 16 and 18, 2023, to rid the port corridor of shanties and illegal erections which harbor the criminals who allegedly perpetrate the extortion.

The NPA, in a statement issued on Tuesday, July 25, 2023, said the extortion ranged from N500 to as high as N5,000, calling for the collaboration of sister government agencies operating along the port corridor to "sustainably tackle this menace that is impeding ease of doing business around our ports".

The Authority noted that it has completed the perimeter fencing of the Tincan Island Port

to curb unauthorised access to the port premises, adding that the sanity achieved by this measure was localized within the port as majority of the illegalities happen along the port access road which "is not within the NPA's purview".

On the eve of the port corridor clearance operations carried out in collaboration with Lagos State Government earlier this month, the NPA Managing Director/CEO, Mohammed Bello Koko, had lamented that "these acts of extortion and allied illegalities are injurious to trade facilitation, which is our core function and we cannot allow these nefarious characters make nonsense of the gateways to the national economy which the ports constitute."

Koko added: "We had in the past visited punitive measures on of our staff who were complicit in such unethical practices, and I want to reiterate that once we are confronted with evidence of any our staff involved in these acts of

sabotage, we would sanction them in line with the public service rules and our conditions of service which has zero tolerance for such malfeasance."

Koko had, while receiving the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Idowu Owohunwa, earlier this month at the NPA headquarters enlisted the support of the police in tackling the extortion menace.

He stated that "the jurisdictional rule that restricts the powers of the Port Authority Police Command (PAPC) to the Port premises is the more reason why we are calling for increased synergy between PAPC and officers of the Lagos State Police Command".

The NPA MD/CEO had earlier met with the leadership at various levels of the Nigerian Army, the Navy, the Federal Road Safety Corp FRSC, and the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority LASTMA stressing on the pressing need to collectively nip the menace of extortion in the bud.

Business

As eNaira advocacy gains momentum



Nigeria's Payments System trajectory started with Payments System Vision 2020 (PSV 2020) in 2007 with the objective of making the Nigeria's Payments System internationally recognised and nationally utilised. The transformation no doubt has been phenomenal.

The phased implementation of the Vision, and other developments in the Nigeria's financial landscape, including the pursuit of the Financial System Stability Vision 2020 (FSS 2020) has no doubt stimulated an exponential growth in commercial and financial activities.

The rapid growth in the volume and value of financial transactions also became a huge source of revenue for the providers of payment services particularly banks and other stakeholders.

Among other benefits are fostering safety and efficiency of payment, clearing, settlement, and recording systems, promotion of financial system stability, speed of service and transactions, development of new lifestyle products, financial inclusion, etc.

The growth has also significantly altered the risks associated with the payment and settlement of these transactions. However, as human economic activities

crave for more sophisticated, efficient, and convenient means of exchange, so also is the urge to innovate.

Thus, the advent of electronic payments system in the Nigeria financial space became imperative. This crave has changed the mode of how people pay for goods and services, and is ultimately bringing in a larger number of the bankable segment of the economy into the financial net.

It has also enhanced the Central Bank of Nigeria's financial inclusion objectives. Globally though, electronic channels of payment are advanced, sophisticated, huge and a booming industry particularly in the developed economies and had attracted investments than other financial services sector, and delivering highest returns.

These are the FinTechs. COVID-19, the global pandemic that wreaked socio-economic havoc in its wake also offered the rest of the world the opportunity to lock into that space.

As economies locked down globally, electronic and virtual ways of conducting economic and social activities replaced physicality. Nigeria leveraged the auspicious occasion to fledge its burgeoning electronic channels of payment.

Countries in the continent,

including Nigeria, during and post COVID-19, witnessed quantum leap in e-payment transactions – mobile transactions particularly witnessed increased volumes to almost 800/900 million per day. What fuelled the surge, and adoption, is the huge infrastructure investment in FinTechs.

It helped to advanced and accelerated its usage. The vision of Central Bank of Nigeria, envisioned in its financial inclusion agenda manual also greatly impacted its acceptance, gradually inching to the 85 percent financial inclusion target.

The Nigerian economy as we all know is traditionally cash-based despite visible risks and cumbersomeness. This practice is typical of the traders and politicians, the narrative CBN foresaw and want to change.

The scenario played out during the Naira Redesign and 2022/2023 political campaigns. The intention was misconstrued. The fulcrum of CBN payments system architecture was to encourage Nigerians to embrace a more convenient, cheap, and safe means of transactions, thereby saving the Bank the huge cost of replacing and reprinting of misfit banknotes.

Thus, it was fitting to expand the e-payment landscape. That desire

birthed the introduction and launch of Nigeria's digital currency – eNaira, the first digital currency in the continent.

The introduction was to cut down the emerging influence of cybernetic crypto currencies, gaining traction internationally, and in Nigeria. The emerging trend was considered not only inimical to the financial system but its stability.

eNaira, the digital currency of the Naira banknotes is not to obliterate the usage or acceptance of the physical Naira banknotes, but to complement it. A digital currency that provides a unique form of money denominated in Naira.

eNaira is to serve as both a medium of exchange and a store of value, offering better payment prospects in retail transactions when compared to cash payments. eNaira has an exclusive operational structure that is both remarkable, and nothing like other forms of central bank money.

It will foster economic growth by providing easy access to capital and financial services with potential to increase economic activities at low or probably at no interest transaction.

Nigeria's eNaira is also secure and cheaper for swift Diaspora remittances, traceable, and with capacity to check illicit and fraudulent

transactions. The CBN eNaira has the capacity to galvanize both local and international economic activities by making transactions not only cheap, safe, and quick, but better.

It has impenetrable security features that cannot be compromised. And for the government, and other revenue generating agencies, even tertiary institutions, eNaira offers a veritable platform for collection of revenues and school fees, thereby reducing cash handling and incidences of theft and corruption.

Recently, the CBN embarked on another phase of its sensitization campaign to tertiary institutions nationwide, organized CBN Sensitization Fairs in Bauchi and Gombe States, and attended the Chambers of Trade and Commerce organized Trade Fairs in Kaduna and Enugu to step up its sensitization and enlightenment of Nigerians on eNaira.

The sensitization had also been held in markets and motor parks in Abuja, Lagos and some major cities in the country. The Bank has thus offered a veritable platform for the government to conduct all its transactions through the platform, and its banker, if it is committed to shoring up its revenue and fighting corruption.

Entertainment

Actress Peggy Ovire arrests crew member for stealing on movie set



By Ere-ebi Agedah Imisi

Popular Nollywood actress, Peggy Ovire has arrested a production crew member on her movie set stealing generator gas cylinder and other items.

Sharing the video of the suspect's arrest on her Instagram page on Monday, the actress simply identified

him as Chizoba.

Recounting her encounter with the suspect on the set, Peggy explained that the production was being filmed at an apartment she provided for the crew to rent.

Alerting her colleagues, the actress wrote: "Dear film makers, this post is for you all to never employ this guy called Chizoba. I met him on a production I was in, the production was filming at an apartment I asked

them to rent, immediately the job was over this guy came back to steal gas cylinder and generator parts worth 80k and sold it for 15k two weeks ago.

"This same guy came again today for the 3rd time to steal another cylinder before he was caught. I was at the gym when they called that someone was caught and he was claiming to be a movie film maker.

"It's obvious this guy is a serial thief. See you in court".

BBNaija All Stars: I'll form alliance to take down Mercy - Ike



Big Brother Naija All Stars housemate, Ike Onyema, has threatened to work against his ex-lover and fellow housemate, Mercy Eke.

Ike stated this in his conversation with fellow housemate, Angel Smith on the

ongoing BBNaija All Stars reality show.

Speaking about his nomination for eviction, Ike said, "I have a feeling that Mercy wanted to nominate me and I don't know why.

"But If she tries anything funny

I will form alliances and we will take her down, I will make sure she doesn't win, sheybi her fans get money ni, they will vote tire."

Recall that Mercy and Ike met during the Season 4 of BBNaija show in 2019, and their relationship crashed in 2020.

My mother attempted to abort me - Mercy Eke

Big Brother Naija Season 4 winner, Mercy Eke, has revealed that her mum attempted to get rid of the pregnancy that produced her.

The reality star disclosed this in a recent chat with popular media personality, Chude Jideonwo.

She said one of her aunties advised her mother to get rid of the pregnancy because she already had five children.

Eke said, "When she [my mother] was pregnant, there is this aunty of mine...She [my mother] has already had five children then this last one which is me. She has four girls and one boy. So, when that my aunty came, she was like, 'Ah! Emilia, is this another pregnancy? With all these children you've dumped here.'

"So, that thing messed with her [my mother] mental health. It really messed with her that she wanted to like get me out then. She was going to the farm, she would climb something you would fall so that I will go but me I stubborn na. I no go anywhere. I dey gidigba.

"Yeah, it was a true story. She wanted to get me off."

The 32-year-old said her mum told her the story recently.



Entertainment

Toyin Abraham stirs reactions as she shares disturbing message

Nollywood actress and Filmmaker, Toyin Abraham Ajeyemi has sparked reactions from netizens following a disturbing post on her Twitter page.

As many continue to lament over the hardship in the country, the Mum of one had revealed her current state of mind.

Toyin Abraham stated that she is confused and tired.

"I am confused and tired", she tweeted.

As expected, many took to the blog's comment section to react to her disturbing post. While some expressed concern for her, others lambasted her for being a proud supporter of the current administration.

One Mheenarh wrote, "Everybody will face consequences of their actions. No, disturb us abeg

Mercee wrote, "It's okay to be confused and tired. These celebrities are humans too

One Tosin Juls wrote, "Everybody is confused and tired. She's part of the cause of it. Asiwaju children

One Queen Susz wrote, "God, please protect my Toyin and her family

One Vic wrote, "Why won't you be confused when you supported an ancestor? Na everybody e go touch Sha

One Sir Eltee wrote, "It seems like the administration is not favouring her and their family. Let her keep praying

One Kinky Vee wrote, "Asiwaju Baby, don't be tired and confused oh. This Tinubu govt will favour you and your family. Yoruba ronuu".



Toyin Abraham

Money, shoes, wigs, all gone', BBNaija's Tacha robbed in Paris

Former Big Brother Naija housemate, Tacha has cried out after being robbed of her belongings in Paris, capital of France.

The reality star took to her Twitter account on Monday to make this known.

The said to have arrived in Paris with three luggage, but "two of them were stolen".

Tacha lamented that she "lost some valuable items such as her laptop, wigs, shoes, clothes, and money".

Terrifying!! Paris the real ghetto my laptop, money\$, shoes, wigs, clothes all gone," she wrote.

Recall Tacha recently revealed that she didn't join the ongoing 'All Stars' edition of the Big Brother Naija season 8 because the organisers of the show failed to meet her financial demands.



We buy the cheapest fuel in the world" – Eniola Badmus praises



Eniola

NOLLYWOOD actress and staunch supporter of the APC, Eniola Badmus has said that Nigerians buy the cheapest fuel in the world.

Eniola Badmus has been known for her great support for the All Progressive Congress, especially to Bola Tinubu before and after he won the elections.

In an interview on Instagram Live with Daddy Freeze, Eniola Badmus disclosed that she threw her support behind President Tinubu because he is a cheerful giver and always wants to lend a helping hand to others; describing him as a philanthropist.

The actress further added that many people are blaming Tinubu for the prices of fuel hikes because they don't understand what subsidy means. She emphasized that Nigeria buys the cheapest fuel in the world.

16,000 deaths occur in Nigeria Annually As A Result of tobacco-related diseases

In Nigeria, about 16100 tobacco-related deaths occur yearly, these numbers may be grossly underrated because of weak surveillance Blessing Bature writes

Tobacco is one of the biggest public health threats confronting the world. According to the report from the World Health Organization, tobacco accounts for more than 8 million deaths annually around the world, with more than 7 million of those deaths resulting from direct tobacco use while about 1.2 million as a result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke.

The WHO report also shows that over 80% of the world's 1.3 billion tobacco users live in low- and middle-income countries.

Every day, almost 2,500 children under 18 years of age try their first cigarette, and more than 400 of them will become new, regular daily smokers. 3 Half of them will ultimately die from their habit.

People who start smoking at an early age are more likely to develop a severe addiction to nicotine than those who start at a later age. Of adolescents who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime, most of them report that they would like to quit, but are not able to do so.

If current tobacco use patterns persist, an estimated 5.6 million of today's youth under age 18 eventually will die prematurely from a smoking-related disease.

Cigarette smoking during childhood and adolescence causes significant health problems among young people, including an increase in the number and severity of respiratory illnesses, decreased physical fitness and potential effects on lung growth and function.

Most importantly, this is when an addiction to smoking takes hold, often lasting into and sometimes throughout adulthood. Among adults who have ever smoked daily, 87% had tried their first cigarette by the time they were 18 years of age, and 95% had by age 21.

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In Nigeria, the 2012 Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS), showed that 5.6% (4.5 million) Nigerians 15 years and older were currently using tobacco products of which 3.9% (3.1 million) were current smokers.

With regards to tobacco-related mortality in Nigeria, the Tobacco Atlas 6th edition estimates that more than 26.800 annual deaths occur in the country from tobacco-related diseases.

Also, 2021 study by the Centre for



the Study of the Economies of Africa, reported that annually 29,472 deaths in Nigeria were attributable to smoking.

The World No Tobacco Day provides government with yet another opportunity to inform the general public about what it is doing to safeguard the lives of Nigerians and residents of Nigeria from the debilitating health effect of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke as well as what government is doing to hold the tobacco industry accountable for the damages they cause.

The theme for this year's campaign which is "We Need Food, Not Tobacco" seeks to raise awareness about alternative crop production, marketing opportunities for tobacco farmers and encourage these farmers to grow sustainable, nutritious crops.

It also aims to expose the tobacco industry's efforts which are known

to contribute to the global food crisis through interference with government's laudable policies that are geared at promoting viable, profitable and sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing.

Tobacco which is believed to have originated from South America, is grown under a wide range of climates, but it requires a frost-free period of 90 to 120 days from transplanting to last harvest of leaves under an optimum mean daily temperature between 20 and 30°C.

Currently, tobacco is cultivated in over 125 countries cumulatively utilizing an estimated area greater than 4 million hectares, which is an area approximately the entire landmass of Zamfara State.

Although, Nigeria is not a major producer of tobacco leaf in the world, but the 2022 data from the Food and Agriculture Organization show that in the African Region, Nigeria ranks 9th position with an estimated 9,150 hectares of land used for tobacco farming.

The reported tobacco farming States in Nigeria are Osun, Oyo, Kwara, and Sokoto States. In Africa, the top 8 leading tobacco growing countries are Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Zambia; yet these leading tobacco-growing African countries have poor Gross Domestic Product (GDP) implying that tobacco farming does not bring wealth and prosperity.

Generally, people are aware of the harm caused by tobacco use via smoking, chewing, and snuffing, but there is less focus on the harm caused by tobacco growing on farmers, their families and the environment.

Tobacco farmers are exposed to a number of health risks, such as acute nicotine poisoning, which is a condition also known as green tobacco sickness. This sickness occurs when farmers absorb nicotine through their skin as they come into contact with leaves of the mature tobacco plant, and it is characterized largely by nausea, vomiting, headache, muscle weakness, and dizziness.

According to WHO, a tobacco farmer who cultivates and harvests tobacco may absorb in a single day, as much nicotine as is found in 50 cigarettes.

Children contribute significantly to the tobacco farming workforce in low- and middle-income countries and are therefore exposed. Globally, widespread cultivation of tobacco leaf has raised various public health concerns including concern for child labour and for occupational health hazards.

Children are more susceptible to nicotine absorption and green tobacco sickness given their proportionately lower body mass.



This \$800m World Bank loan request is coming shortly after the Red Chamber of the legislature approved another request from the President to securitise the pending N22.7 trillion Ways and Means Advances of the Central Bank of Nigerians (CBN)

CONTUEN FROM PAGE 26

16,000 deaths occur in Nigeria Annually As A Result of tobacco-related diseases



Also, there is evidence to show that exposure to chemicals such as pesticides, herbicides, fumigants among children who work on tobacco farms may result in severe chronic health consequences, due to higher risks of cancer, reproductive health issues, mood disorders, and permanent neurological damage.

According to the regional Director, World Health Organisation, Dr Matshidiso Moeti said tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health challenges the world has ever faced, killing more than eight million people around the world every year. While the number of people using tobacco products is decreasing in other parts of the world, it is rising in the Africa Region. For example, the number of tobacco users in the WHO African Region increased from an estimated 64 million adult users in 2000 to 73 million in 2018.

This is partly due to the increased production of tobacco products as well as aggressive marketing by the tobacco industry.

She informed that the World Health Organization, joins the rest of the international community to commemorate World No Tobacco Day. The day which provides us the opportunity to highlight the dangers associated with tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke.

She said, "It is also an occasion to renew our advocacy for effective policies to halt the tobacco epidemic

and its impact on individuals, societies, and nations.

Moeti hinted that Tobacco growing and production exacerbates nutrition and food insecurity. Tobacco farming destroys the ecosystems, depletes soils of fertility, contaminates water bodies and pollutes the environment. Any profits to be gained from tobacco as a cash crop may not offset the damage done to sustainable food production in low- and middle-income countries.

She said, Nearly 828 million people are facing hunger globally. Of these, 278 million (20%) are in Africa. In addition, 57.9% of people in Africa suffer from moderate to severe food insecurity.

This jeopardizes the region's attainment of SDG 2 which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. The intensification of the major drivers behind recent food insecurity and malnutrition trends, such as conflict, climate extremes, and economic shocks, further compounds this situation. Therefore, our concerted actions are essential, so everyone has enough food.

"We face a grave challenge in food and nutrition security imposed by the increasing tobacco farming in the Africa Region. Available data shows that while the area under tobacco cultivation decreased by 15.7% globally, in Africa it increased by 3.4% from 2012 to 2018. During this period,

tobacco leaf production globally reduced by 13.9%; however, it increased by 10.6% in Africa. In recent years, tobacco cultivation has shifted to Africa because of a regulatory environment that is more favourable to the tobacco industry, as well as increasing demand for tobacco".

"WHO is working with Member States and other partners to assist farmers in shifting from tobacco growing to alternative crops.

She urged governments to support tobacco farmers to switch to alternative crops by ending tobacco growing subsidies and using the savings for crop substitution programmes to improve food security and nutrition. Shifting from tobacco to nutritious food crops has the potential to feed millions of families and improve the livelihoods of farming communities in Africa.

"Such initiatives will also combat desertification and environmental degradation, raise awareness in tobacco farming communities about the benefits of moving away from tobacco and growing sustainable crops and exposing the tobacco industry's efforts to obstruct sustainable livelihoods work in the Africa Region".

"We appeal to tobacco-growing countries in the Africa Region to step up the implementation of Articles 17 and 18 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) by enacting legislation, developing, and implementing suitable policies

and strategies, and enabling market conditions for tobacco farmers to shift to growing food crops that would provide them and their families with a better life while enhancing the protection of the environment and the health of people. By doing this, we will be growing food, which our populations need, not tobacco," she said.

In the same vein, The Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Health, Engr. Olufunsho Adebisi during a press briefing to mark the 2023 World No Tobacco Day, in Abuja said the National Tobacco Control (NTC) Act 2015 also prioritizes alternative cropping for tobacco farmers. Specifically, Section 5(h) of the NTC Act mandates the National Tobacco Control Committee (NATOCC) to work with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant agencies on alternative cropping for tobacco farmers.

He noted that the Federal Ministry of Health and the NATOCC, is committed to working with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure this is achieved.

"We solicit the continued support of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure Nigeria has data on the number of farmers involved in tobacco farming and the total hectareage of tobacco farming, as well as make provision for alternative cropping for these farmers.

According to him, June last year, the Federal government of Nigerian commenced

implementation of a new three-year tobacco tax regime. This new regime increased the Ad-Valorem tax rate from 20% to 30%. In addition to the 30% ad-valorem, the specific excise rate was increased from N58 to N84 per pack of 20 sticks of cigarette, and this will further be increased to N94 per pack from June 2023; and then N104 per pack in 2024. Also, Shisha was taxed in 2022 at the rate of N3,000 per litre and N1,000 per kilogram and this will be increased yearly by N500.

"Government is committed to ensuring that the data on tobacco use and other indices are updated. The Ministry in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics and the WHO Country Office has commenced planning for the conduct of the second round of the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS). The survey is being funded by American Centre for Disease Control (CDC), and the CDC Foundation.

"The Ministry is also committed to reducing the prevalence of tobacco use in Nigeria, and government has implemented several interventions to achieve this. This includes effective regulation of the tobacco business operations in Nigeria. In 2021, as empowered by the NTC Act, the Honourable Minister of Health upon recommendation from the National Tobacco Control Committee commenced the issuance of tobacco business licenses to manufacturers and distributors of tobacco products in Nigeria.

Education Digest

UNICEF, Partners to cushion effect of poverty on education, others

By Ngozi Nwankwo

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other Social Protection Development Partners including Save the Children, Ministry of Finance, and others have teamed up to redefine Nigeria's poverty profile by expanding social protection.

At the opening ceremony of a two-day policy and programmatic dialogue workshop on Nigeria's poverty profile and social register on Tuesday in Abuja, Cristian Munduate, UNICEF Nigeria Representative, applauded various efforts of government and development partners in combating poverty and vulnerability. Munduate said she has

personally witnessed the menace of poverty across the country and its toll in several aspects of people's lives, including education.

"From Lagos to Sokoto, I have met individual like Tutu, a struggling single mother, and Umar, a child deprived of education, who personify the reality of our poverty statistics.

"As of 2022, 63 per cent of our

population faces deprivation, a disturbing figure that includes 70 million children," she said.

According to the UNICEF Nigeria Representative, the workshop was put in place to brainstorm on poverty and vulnerability situation in the country in order to chart possible solutions, adding that it was also aimed at expanding Nigeria's social register and establish a robust, inclusive, and responsive social protection system.

"Our goal is a Nigeria where all citizens, particularly women, children, and the disabled, have access to strong social protections and are not living on the edge of poverty.

"Amid global challenges such as oil price fluctuations, insecurity, socio-economic disparities, and pandemics like COVID-19, poverty is further gripping our people, indicating a dire need for effective social protection interventions. This meeting, hence, symbolizes hope for a future where every Nigerian feels recognized and safeguarded.

"The essentiality of a comprehensive register to reach those most in need can't be overstated. I'm grateful to the

Social Protection Development Partners Group, our unwavering government, and NASSCO for strengthening the National Social Register, a significant step towards our goal," she said.

Also speaking, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Senator George Akume said poverty and vulnerability remain pressing challenges facing Nigeria.

Akume who was represented by the Permanent Secretary, Political and Economic Affairs, office of the Secretary to Government of the Federation, Esuabana Nko-Asanye, said it was crucial to recognise the impact of the issues of poverty and vulnerability on Nigerians citizens.

"Poverty and vulnerability remain pressing challenges in our country, and as we gather here today, it is crucial to recognize the impact of these issues on our fellow citizens. Despite progress in reducing poverty rates in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with new challenges, pushing approximately 63 per cent of our population into multi-dimensional poverty of which almost 70 million are children.



Corps Members urged to make impact in their host communities

By Ngozi Nwankwo

Director General of National Youth Service Corps, Brigadier General Yusha'u Dogara Ahmed has urged Corps Members to ensure that they leave good footprints in their host communities before they end their service year.

He advised them to initiate and execute good projects that will improve the well-being of their hosts.

The DG stated this while addressing Corps Members during his visit to NYSC Bayelsa State Permanent Orientation Camp in Boro, Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of the State, likewise their counterpart in Delta State Orientation Camp in Isele-Uku.

He added that one of the four cardinal programmes of the Scheme, Community Service CDS, was designed to improve the standard of living of the public.

Ahmed also warned the Corps Members to be security conscious at all times. He enjoined them not to indulge in anything that can expose them to danger.

"You must be security conscious at all times. Avoid late night movements and don't travel at night. Avoid lone movements and

Lecturer Calls for Review of Mass Communication

By Kayode Abdulazez, Ilorin

A Lecturer at the Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti, Oyewale Oyelola, has called for review of the Mass Communication curriculum in line with emerging technologies.

Oyelola made this call during Media Entrepreneurship training organized by African Young Media Professionals held at the Center for Management Development (CMD), Lagos.

He observed that Mass Communication curriculum for University and

don't board vehicles by the roadside. If you are traveling, go to designated motorparks.

"When traveling and once it is six in the evening, break your journey and pass the night in any military or police barrack, Corps Lodge, NYSC formations and other safe places", he said.

The NYSC Bayelsa State Coordinator, Mrs Obiageli Okpalifo informed the Director General that general conduct of the Corps Members have been impressive.

Okpalifo added that all the registered 1,159 Corps Members made up of 576 males and 583 females, in conjunction with concerted efforts of the diligent camp officials has made all activities very seamless.

NYSC Delta State Coordinator, Mr Olusegun Alao informed the DG that the synergy between the entire camp officials and the cooperation of 1,905 Corps Members consisting 891 males and 1,014 females have been tremendously impressive.

Polytechnic does not reflect changes in the profession birthed by technological advancement across the globe.

According to him, Nigeria needs to brace up with advanced countries in terms of media practice by reviewing the curriculum in line with technological advancement such as artificial intelligence, computer based news verification tools, fact checking mechanisms and modern content distribution strategies across platforms.



Egbetokun visits, parleys Alma mater as school prepares 50th anniversary

By Ngozi Nwankwo

The Acting Inspector General of Police, IGP Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun, had a momentous and nostalgic visit to his alma mater, the Anglican Comprehensive High School Ipaja, in preparation for its upcoming 50th-anniversary celebration, for which he is the esteemed Chairman of the Planning Committee.

The visit served as a remarkable opportunity for the IGP to reconnect with his roots and foster a sense of unity and pride amongst the school's alumni, staff, and current students.

During the parley, the IGP reminisced about his time at the school which culminated in 1979, and expressed his gratitude for the solid foundation it laid in shaping

his character and career.

He emphasised the significance of education in shaping future leaders and pledged his unwavering support to ensure the 50th-anniversary celebration becomes an unforgettable milestone for the school.

The IGP's visit has reignited a spirit of camaraderie and enthusiasm among the school community, as they eagerly look forward to celebrating five decades of academic excellence and nurturing young minds for a brighter future.

The 50th-anniversary celebration promised to be a momentous occasion, as the IGP, along with the entire Anglican Comprehensive High School Ipaja community, came together to celebrate a rich history of excellence and chart a path for even greater accomplishments in the future.

NSCDC partners local, international partners on implementation of Safe Schools

By Ngozi Nwankwo

Commandant General, CG, of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, NSCDC, Dr Ahmed Abubakar Audi, has expressed willingness to work collaboratively with local and international partners to enhance effective and successful implementation of the Safe Schools programme in Nigeria.

The CG stated this during a working visit of the Head of Advocacy and Campaigns Impact, Accountability and Learning, Save the Children Ankara Turkey, Mr Vahit Kutluer, to the National Safe Schools Response Coordination Centre (NSSRCC), at the NSCDC National Headquarters, Abuja.

Represented by the Commander of the Centre, CSC Tersoo Shaapera, PhD, the CG said he was delighted with the contributions of Save the Children International, SCI, for its role in sponsoring efforts aimed at protecting children globally and stressed that the centre welcomes partnership from local and international stakeholders like the SCI.

"With the establishment of the centre, schools have been scrutinised, thus placing high premium on the protection of students, teachers, workers and communities", the CG said.

He announced the determination of the Corps to synergise with other security agencies and critical stakeholders in ensuring maximum success of the programme.

The CG explained that, prior to the implementation of the Safe Schools programme, a national vulnerability survey was carried out by the NSCDC on schools in the country, which provided background for implementation and official launch of the centre on July 13, 2023.

According to him, the centre was established to be proactive rather than being reactive in its operations and so far, over 37 attacks have been prevented on schools across the country.

The Head of Advocacy and Campaigns Impact, Accountability and Learning from Save the Children Ankara Turkey, Vahit Kutluer, in his speech, explained that the visit to the NSSRCC provided him an opportunity to ascertain areas of possible collaboration with the centre.

Comments

10th Assembly's Mission towards making Nigeria great

By Philip Agbese

The 10th Assembly is here, and as usual, there are expectations from the citizenry. This is because the legislative arm of government is responsible for making laws in a country. And laws are essential because it establishes a socially acceptable standard.

This goes a long way to state the strategic importance of the legislative arm of government and why we must get it right concerning enacting laws with far-reaching for our socioeconomic well-being as a country.

As a member of the 10th Assembly, I am burdened with the task of making valuable contributions in the process that would lead to enacting laws for the country. My colleagues share this burden in the lower and upper chambers. There is an overachieving objective by the leadership of the 10th Assembly to make the business of lawmaking worth its name.

The leadership of the Senate and the House of Representatives has exhibited this much. As a first, the quality of legislators is top-notch. This is evident in the few weeks after President Bola Ahmed Tinubu inaugurated the 10th Assembly.

My constituency is the House of Representatives, and I can't hide my excitement with the leadership strides of the Speaker, Rt. Hon Tajudeen Abass. The passion and dedication to make a change is palpable. The members are also eager to prove the point that the interest of the country comes first.

As a member of the House of Representatives, I have had cause to interact with my colleagues across party lines, and there is a uniformity in ideas and commitment. Nigerians might not know that the 10th Assembly is an amalgamation of intellectuals, technocrats, and experienced private and public sector experts with an intimidating resume that resonates with the desire to make Nigeria work.

This much has been exhibited so far; the months and years ahead would be exhilarating—the leadership of the House of Representatives led by Rt. Hon. Tajudeen Abass is on a mission to make meaningful contributions to the country's development through the instrumentality of quality and far-reaching laws.

This is the mood, and Nigerians should expect nothing less. The desire to make Nigeria great has enveloped the lower chambers. As such, the debate at plenary has been intellectually engaging. It has never been a dull moment from day one. I believe it would continue till the

termination of the 10th Assembly.

What is the implication of this drive? It means that the 10th Assembly would not be a rubber stamp. It would stand on the side of the citizenry rather than for a select few. There are no excuses for excellence, and the ultimate desire is for a new Nigeria where our hopes and aspirations would translate to tangible realities.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt Hon Tajudeen Abass, is an infectious personality. His vast experience in the legislative business has set the House of Representatives on a pedestal that would elicit laws with far-reaching positives for the country—a man of few words but a master of teamwork.

The same goes for the principal officers. There is an unwritten agreement with regard to the focus of the House of Representatives. All members have somewhat keyed into the process, and one could easily feel the excitement at plenary. As the various committees are inaugurated, one thing would stand out, the quality of oversight functions would be a departure from the past.

Why is the number ten unique and significant in numerology? The energy behind the number ten is leadership and innovation. Taking an example in a football team, number ten is the team's primary playmaker, operating in a

free role between the midfield and the forwards. They lead the team's attack using their excellent vision, control, and passing range to dictate the play. Sounds interesting right?

That is what Nigerians should expect from the 10th Assembly in the months and years ahead. The contributions of the 10th Assembly to nation-building would be phenomenal. The indications are apparent, and the mood is set for what would go down in history as one of the best in legislative governance in the country.

The House of Representatives is leading this charge, and I say with all humility that the Speaker, Rt. Hon. Tajudeen Abass, other principal officers, and members are poised to make it happen.

Undoubtedly, the country is not experiencing the best of times. But I can state confidently that this awareness resonates at every opportunity during plenary. All members of the House of Representatives are bustling with a passion to contribute towards making Nigeria great again. This is a pledge that I stand with now and always. May God bless Nigeria and grant those with the desire to make Nigeria great the grace to be of service to the country.

—Agbese writes this piece from the National Assembly, Abuja.

The gradual death of the local government system

By Eric Teniola

ON May 4 this year, the Edo Deputy Governor, Philip Shaibu, lambasted the 18 local government chairmen in the state over their Internally Generated Revenue (IGR). At a meeting with the council leaders, Shaibu said it was disappointing that they generate only N3 million (combined) every month. "Between now and the end of May, I will personally do a letter to the Governor (Godwin Obaseki) to sack you people. Before sacking, we will get the EFCC to check all your books...and you'll be fired. We cannot continue like this. How can 18 local governments (generate) N3million in a month as revenue? 18 local governments, N3million!"

Shaibu fumed. I don't know whether or not any of the chairmen of the local government in Edo State has been prosecuted, if we are to go by the threat of Comrade Shaibu. I think Comrade Shaibu is just being pharisaical. He knows why the local governments are not performing. He cannot claim ignorance.

Being the son of late Pastor Francis Osikpomobo Shaibu, Comrade Shaibu grew up in a family where issues are discussed at breakfasts, devoid of emotions and sentiments. And as a former President of the National Association of Nigerians Students between 2000 and 2001, he is well enlightened on the provisions of the constitution. He even represented Etsako in the Edo State House of Assembly in 2010 and in the House of Representatives later. He knows that governors have abused the provisions of the constitution as regards the Local Government. That is not to say that I am blaming Comrade Shaibu, an ex senior officer of the Nigerian Prison Service, for the defect in the constitution. The third tier of government is dying in Nigeria. That is not the way it is supposed to be.

And what is happening in Edo state, is happening in the remaining 35 states in the country. Each of us who grew up in the fifties and the sixties saw the smooth running of the local government system; it was perfect at that time.

According to Mr. U.D. Anyanwu in a book titled Foundations Of Nigerian Federalism—1900-1960, edited by J. Isawa Elaigwu and G.N. Uzoigwe, local government administration in colonial Nigeria contributed to the evolution of federalism in Nigeria largely because of two sets of actors: the internal and the external. The internal had to do with the plurality of cultures, people and even geography which made it necessary for the colonial authorities to adopt the indirect rule system which to some degree preserved the respective identities of Nigerian peoples. That is, it was the local government system which was used to make each Nigerian group feel that despite colonial rule as well as the evolving colonial state of Nigeria, their respective aspirations and values were to be preserved.

This internal aspect affected not only the British political officers and officials who were in charge of the component units that made Nigeria but also the emerging nationalist and political leaders whose activities contributed to the successful decolonization of Nigeria. In fact, throughout the colonial period, the dominant opinion among the leaders and people was that the local government system should keep to the principle of separate development espoused by the colonial authorities.

By the time of independence, this internal consideration had also involved the aspect of the value the local government system had to serve in the power struggle among the regional political parties. The external dimension had first to do with the way Nigerian was acquired separately (in parts), phases and instalmentally by different units of the colonizing power. Thus, though the

invaders and colonizers belonged to the same country, Britain, yet they initially settled in different geographical and cultural areas as independent rulers. Some vested interest developed in the process and so even when amalgamation came up, there were significant variations in their views on how local government and indeed the entire colonial administration should be organized.

Largely, because of this, the respective colonial administrative regimes of the British in Nigerian found it plausible to insist on a local government system whose cardinal common feature was the achievement of separate development for a colonial state of divergent cultures. Since these positions espoused by both the internal and external agents were also translated to arrangements at the higher tiers of government (namely the central and the regional), the result was that local government administration became essentially the concern of regional governments.

The other related result was that the regional governments gave their respective local governments the character considered appropriate to the region. This was how local government administration played crucial roles in the forging of federalism in Nigeria. A number of conclusions are derivable from all these. Local government administration in colonial Nigeria in theory and practice was designed to promote federalism. In the process it also became a promoter of regional thinking often at the expense of the country.

In fact, it was not organized to promote the sense or thought of one country among the component citizenry. Therefore as at independence in 1960, local government administration was a sort of mixed blessing for Nigerian federalism. At one level it enabled the policy of separate development to prosper and thus fostered federalist impulses.

At another, it became the captive of regional

governments and forces, championing essentially regional aspirations and interest with little or no care for federal ones. It can also be seen that the "accidental foundations of federalism and its corollary, local government (native administration) in Nigeria under Lugard had become consciously pursued foundation by the end of colonial rule, leaving the country with the dilemma posed by the legacy of this mixed blessing since then. The unwavering dimensions of this dilemma include intergovernmental relations, the status of local government, and its role in the federal set-up.

Of all the tragedies that have struck governance in Nigeria, the gradual death of the local government system is the worst. Whether we like it or not, the local government system is dying. Today, if I may ask, which of the local governments is functioning? The central government must save the local government from total collapse. And the best way is to reform the system. I quite agree with the Clement Ebrí's committee report that the preponderant position of all the local government councils in the federation is that local governments should merge as creations of the Constitution in order to give them full-fledged autonomy.

The provision in Section 7 (1) of the constitution which guarantees a system of democratically elected councils is seen as achieving that objective. But a continuation of the same subsection (1) went further to empower the State Houses of Assembly to make laws to ensure their existence by providing for their establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils. This is seen as detracting from the desired constitutionally guaranteed autonomy.

—Teniola, a former director at the presidency, lives in Lagos.

Fighting hunger in Nigeria via agricultural research

The need to improve agricultural production so as to create food security and reduce unemployment requires constant improvement of researches and advanced technologies on soil improvement.

THE main objective of AGriDI is to enhance inclusive green growth through agriculture-based digital innovations, especially for women and youth farmers in West Africa. The grant call was initiated and only FUNAAB's SmartSoil project was successful among higher institution submissions from Nigeria. No doubt, the SmartSoil is certainly poised to make a big difference and desired impact in fostering agricultural productivity.

It is usually said that doing the same thing over and over again without yielding results is simply an indication that there is need for a change in strategy. Over the years, a number of policies, programmes and projects have been pursued in a bid to put food on the table of Nigerians. What do we have today? Many people still go about hungry, able-bodied youths and young persons idling away due to unemployment, and large scale poverty in the land. A ray of hope seems to be unfolding with the introduction of SmartSoil technology to farming and agricultural production in the country. This is because soils provide the foundation for healthy food production and sustainable rural development, thereby contributing to global, national food security and wealth.

As complex and dynamic systems, soil properties vary greatly and are susceptible to deterioration as the intensification of production and demand for productive soils increase. To maximise agricultural productivity in Nigeria, the importance of a soil information platform that is user-friendly, easily accessible, and affordable to millions of Nigerian farmers and other users such as policymakers and researchers, is key. This would go a long way in guiding users on efforts being made to improve the fertility and biodiversity of Nigerian soils and more importantly, improve crop yield and agricultural productivity for millions of farmers. This project, "SmartSoil" development, is a modern soil information system designed for Southwest, Nigeria using digital soil mapping and artificial intelligence techniques by providing hyper-local soil information in such a way that is easily accessible and affordable to farmers and other resource-deficient target groups such as youth, women and other end-users.

SmartSoil is meant to guide farmers on the sustainable use and management of soils resources as well as agronomic advisory service to improve agricultural yield, food security, promote soil biodiversity conservation, and adaptation to climate change. The issue of food insecurity, poverty and astronomical increase in the prices of staples and commodities have been a source of concern in the country, hence the need for increased agricultural crop yields to address the abysmally low food and nutrition security, not only in Nigeria, but Sub-Saharan Africa, given the growing populations, shrinking farm activities due to unfavourable policies, urbanisation and degrading soil fertility, among others. To enhance agricultural productivity in Nigeria, soil information management is ever relevant to serve as guide to farmers and policymakers on what can be done to improve the fertility and biodiversity of Nigerian soils using artificial intelligence techniques in soil



science.

According to the Project Leader of SmartSoil, Prof. Olusegun Folorunso of the Department of Computer Science, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Ogun State, Nigeria, this innovation in digital soil mapping techniques has brought about the deployment of machine learning (ML) models to predict soil distribution in space and time using soil data. The increasing availability of soil data can be efficiently acquired remotely and proximally when combined using freely-available open-source, artificial intelligence algorithms such as random forest, support vector machine, convoluted neural network, leading to accelerated adoption of ML techniques to analyse soil data, and draw conclusions on soil properties such as soil potential of hydrogen (pH), acidity, organic carbon content, cation exchange capacity (CEC), texture, bulk density, moisture retention, hydraulic conductivity, and soil parent material by providing an insight into soil fertility and biodiversity in a large area.

"This project intends to use advanced modelling techniques such as random forest and Support Vector Machine (SVM) that have been established to yield better results. It is aimed at developing SmartSoil, a modern soil information system for Southwest, Nigeria using digital soil mapping and artificial intelligence techniques and in turn, provide hyper-local soil information in such a way that is easily accessible and affordable to farmers and other resource-deficient target groups (youth and women) and other interested end-user. It will guide farmers for the sustainable

use and management of soil resources as well as agronomic advisory service to improve agricultural yield and productivity, food security, promote soil biodiversity conservation, and adaptation to climate change among smallholder farmers", Prof. Folorunso added.

To herald the official commencement of the project, the "SmartSoil KickOff Seminar", titled "Digital soil mapping for optimal agricultural yield and sustainable soil-biodiversity management in Southwest Nigeria using artificial intelligence", was put together to explain to stakeholders what the project was all about and what it is designed to achieve. To demonstrate the high premium placed on the project, the one-day seminar was graced by the vice-chancellor of FUNAAB, who is also an expert in Soil Physics, Prof. Kolawole Salako, who although was not physically present at the occasion due to other official engagements, had his two deputies fully on ground, viz: Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Prof. Christian Ikeobi and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Development), Prof. Olusola Kehinde.

This impressive attendance is in addition to strategic stakeholders from extension agencies like the Ogun State Agricultural Development Programme (OGADep), Oyo State Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (OYMA&RD) and Institute of Agricultural Research and Training (IAR&T), Ibadan, which is affiliated to the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. Not only that, youths and women farmers were invited and turned up from the Gateway State and the neighbouring Oyo and Osun states to have first hand idea since they constitute the major beneficiaries. The don appreciated the university management, noting that the grant was won principally because of the FUNAAB's good records, performance, due diligence on past projects in addition to efforts made in writing the proposal, availability of due diligence and other documents provided by the university when they were made, which made it easier to win the grant, just as vice-chancellor (Prof. Salako) pledged his continued support and equally encouraged the project team members to give their best towards

its success. Making presentations on the project overview, the Project Co-Leader/Head, Soil Science Sub-Group Team, Dr. Mutiu Busari disclosed that the project objectives include increased access to user-friendly soil information for optimal agricultural yield for farmers in Southwest, Nigeria, manpower development for agricultural innovations and adoption, increased awareness of climate change adaptation strategies, soil biodiversity management and soil fertility conservation methodologies among farmers, improved collaboration between university researchers and agricultural policy-makers on how to provide the enabling policy and institutional support for the adoption of digital innovations.

On his part, the Project Manager, Mr. Adebayo Adebayo said the expected outputs would cover baseline survey, SmartSoil android and web app, training courses for farmers, and extension agents on the use of the app, soil biodiversity management, policy briefs on sustainable soil management to policy makers, soil fertility status report for policy makers, and capacity development for young researchers and students on digital innovations development.

The main objective of AGriDI is to enhance inclusive green growth through agriculture-based digital innovations, especially for women and youth farmers in West Africa. The grant call was initiated and only FUNAAB's SmartSoil project was successful among higher institution submissions from Nigeria. No doubt, the SmartSoil is certainly poised to make a big difference and desired impact in fostering agricultural productivity. However, there are a few tips that the project team could find useful. These include constant training and retraining of participants, sustained publicity and enlightenment to elicit necessary support and cooperation, being a new programme while the products and services being offered must be accessible, affordable and cost-friendly.

—Dr. Kupoluyi writes from the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Ogun State, @AdeWaleKupoluyi



To maximise agricultural productivity in Nigeria, the importance of a soil information platform that is user-friendly, easily accessible, and affordable to millions of Nigerian farmers and other users such as policymakers and researchers is key

Foreign



Qin Gang: China removes foreign minister after unexplained absence

China has removed Qin Gang as foreign minister less than seven months after he was appointed to the post.

Mr Qin had been seen as a close associate of President Xi Jinping. He is replaced by veteran Communist Party foreign affairs chief Wang Yi.

Mr Qin's prolonged disappearance from public view - and official silence over it - has fuelled furious speculation.

The 57-year-old's last known public engagements were on 25 June. No

reason was given for his removal.

He had been appointed by China's leader to his post last December. Just over a month ago, he met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Beijing as the two sides sought to restore diplomatic contacts at the highest level.

His departure ends weeks of confusion, but leaves many questions unanswered.

"China's top legislature voted to appoint Wang Yi as foreign minister," state news agency Xinhua said.

"Qin Gang was removed from the post of foreign minister."

The report said President Xi had signed the decree authorising the move. Legislators also voted to replace China's outgoing Central Bank chief Yi Gang - who has reached retirement age - with economist Pan Gongsheng, Xinhua added.

Under the Chinese Communist Party system, foreign policy is formulated by a high-level official, who then directs the foreign minister to implement it.

Wang Yi, a career diplomat who speaks Japanese, is returning to a post he held between 2013 and 2022. He has been standing in for Mr Qin and is currently in South Africa attending a Brics national security meeting.

Observers see the appointment of Mr Wang, 69, as a move to stabilise Chinese diplomacy.

Qin Gang was one of the best-known faces of the Chinese government. His prolonged absence was scrutinised not only by diplomats and China watchers, but also ordinary Chinese people.

When he disappeared from his normal duties a month ago and failed to attend a summit in Indonesia, the very brief official explanation given was unspecified health problems.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, China, June 18, 2023

But the lack of any detail from his ministry led to speculation that he was being punished either for political reasons or because of an extra-marital affair.

His meeting with European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, initially scheduled for 4 July, was then pushed back by China with no explanation, further fuelling rumours.

Asked about Mr Qin's whereabouts on Tuesday before news of his demise, a ministry spokesperson repeated her earlier line that she had no information - highlighting China's secrecy and the opacity of its system of government.

China's 'missing' foreign minister sparks guessing game

Mr Qin is one of the most high-level officials in the Chinese Communist

Party to have been absent for this long.

But it is not uncommon for high-profile figures in China to go out of public view for long periods of time, only to surface later as the subject of a criminal investigation. Or they could reappear with no explanation.

Xi Jinping himself vanished for a fortnight shortly before becoming China's leader in 2012, prompting speculation about his health and possible power struggles within the party.

Mr Qin's rise to become foreign minister was nothing short of dramatic. He is one of the youngest appointees to the post in China's history.

After less than two years in the role of ambassador to the US, where he gained a reputation as a tough-talking diplomat, he was named foreign minister last December.

Before that, he had been a foreign ministry spokesman and had helped organise Mr Xi's trips overseas - which gave him the opportunity to work closely with China's leader.

There has been huge interest in China in what happened to Qin Gang. The country's biggest search engine, Baidu, has seen a surge in searches for his name recently.

It is unusual for rumours about such a senior official to be discussed on the Chinese internet without complete censorship, observers say.

"The absence of censorship makes people wonder if there is any truth to rumours about power struggles, corruption, the abuse of power and positions, and romantic relationships," Ian Chong from the National University of Singapore told the BBC last week.

Brussels bombers found guilty after long murder trial

A court in Brussels has found six men guilty of terrorist murder, more than seven years after suicide bomb attacks killed 32 people at the city's airport and a metro station in March 2016.

After a long trial and 19 days of jury deliberations, the court in Brussels returned their verdicts.

Several of those on trial had already been convicted of taking part in the Paris terror attacks months earlier.

Salah Abdeslam was arrested days before the Brussels bombings.

He was found guilty in France last

year of the 2015 Paris bomb and gun attacks in which 130 died. The Belgian trial, which began last December, has now convicted him of murder and attempted murder in Brussels too.

Another of those now found guilty of both bombings, Mohamed Abrini, was identified on CCTV fleeing Zaventem airport when his explosives did not go off.

He became known as the "man in the hat" and was among a number of suspects arrested in Brussels a few weeks later.

Four other men were found guilty of

terrorist murder: Oussama Atar, Osama Krayem, Ali El Haddad Aoufi and Bilal El Makhoukhi.

Krayem had been seen with the Metro bomber who blew himself up at Maelbeek. But Atar, a Belgian-Moroccan jihadist thought to have planned the Paris attacks from Syria, was tried in absentia and is believed to have died in Syria.

The attacks in Brussels took place within an hour of each other on 22 March 2016.

Two bombs went off shortly before 08:00 at opposite ends of the departures hall at Zaventem airport, leaving 16 people dead.

Then, little more than an hour later, a further blast happened on a train at Maelbeek metro station in Brussels' European quarter, close to EU institutions. Another 16 people died in that bombing.

The court was told that another four people who died in the years following the bombings should also be considered victims of the attacks, bringing the death toll to 36.

Hundreds more were wounded.





Storms ravage northern Italy as Sicily burns

Extreme weather has been battering Italy from north to south. Wildfires are raging in Sicily after weeks of record-breaking temperatures, with local media warning that the city of Palermo is "encircled" by fires. Meanwhile, northern regions are reeling from violent storms and high winds that uprooted trees and lifted roofs off buildings.

In some places, tennis ball-sized hailstones injured people, damaged cars and destroyed crops. A 16-year-old girl was killed when a tree fell on the tent she was sleeping in at a summer camp near the city of Brescia, while a middle-aged woman died after also being hit by a falling tree in Lissone, north of Milan. Overnight, the regions of Lombardy and Veneto experienced

torrential rainfall and extremely strong winds, which reached 100km/h (62mph) in Milan. On Tuesday, local authorities told residents to stay away from public parks, as there is a high risk that branches might snap off trees. One of the city's main attractions, the 15th-Century Sforza Castle, was closed to the public on Tuesday "due to damage caused by severe

weather". The mayor of the city, Giuseppe Sala, said: "I have never seen anything like this... We can't deny it any longer - climate change is changing our lives. "We can't pretend it's not happening and we absolutely can't keep doing nothing," Mr Sala said in a video shared on Facebook. Meanwhile, Sicily - which has already been brought to its knees by a prolonged heatwave - is battling wildfires that are threatening towns and cities across the island. Temperatures of more than 47.5C (117F) were recorded in Catania on Monday.

Several resorts and tourist hotspots around the island have begun evacuating their guests. Palermo Airport was temporarily closed to air traffic on Tuesday morning after wildfires in the hills around it reached the airport perimeter. Local media reported that a firefighter was seriously injured near Palermo while trying to tackle one of the blazes, which are being fuelled by high winds. Half of the bus network in Palermo has been suspended as the vehicles are overheating and cannot cool down because of consistently high temperatures. Hospital Cervello, in the north of the city, is being threatened by the flames, while some wards have been evacuated, Italian media said.

Two die in Greece plane crash as fires burn around Med

The World Weather Attribution group is a group of scientists who try and discern the fingerprint of climate change in weather events and use computers to model how likely a weather event would be before we put carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. They found the southern European heatwave would have been virtually impossible without climate change. This is the case for recent heatwaves in southern Asia and the United States too. What these studies allow us to do is give us an idea of the role climate change is playing right now. An event that was virtually impossible in pre-industrial times now will become effectively

fairly normal weather. Look at the consequences of these high temperatures. It's a frightening indication of how the global climate is changing. We are unprepared in terms of adapting to it. We need to get better at adapting our societies and recognise that climate change will continue to happen until we get control and drive down our use for fossil fuels. If you are planning to travel to an area that could be affected by the ongoing wildfires, the UK government's latest advice is to contact your travel operator or accommodation provider beforehand to check if your trip will be affected and make sure you have

appropriate insurance. Travellers currently in or near an area affected by wildfires are being advised to call the Greek Emergency Services on 112 if you are in immediate danger. The advice states that travellers should also follow the guidance of the emergency services. Anyone affected is also advised to contact their airline or travel operator for assistance with return travel to the UK. Local residents in Rhodes have teamed up with firefighters to help put out the flames, but many say there is a lack of resources. Stavros Nikitaras, a nearby resident, is supporting the villagers and firefighters by finding supplies like water and food. He says: "We don't have any help on the island. You see all the people that are living here. They come to help. I'm not from this village, but I have friends here. So I came to help." Maria Pardalou is a fire volunteer from Vati: "Every year they say.. things will [be] better. Nothing. Every every summer. The same. The same, every summer." The residents say authorities need to send more than the five planes currently being used to waterbomb the flames.

More than 200 people in Palermo have already sought medical attention for smoke inhalation. Two hospitals have suspended routine appointments to ensure people suffering from smoke inhalation or other illnesses related to the extreme heat can be looked after. The farmers' association, Coldiretti, said Sicily was facing an "unprecedented catastrophe and

incalculable environmental damage". The fires are causing deaths across southern Italy. In Sicily, an 88-year-old woman died after falling ill, as the fires prevented emergency services reaching her. A 98-year-old man in the region of Calabria died when the flames from a wildfire reached his home where he was bedbound. In Sardinia, a firefighter died of a stroke after spending hours battling a blaze. The minister for civil protection, Nello Musumeci, wrote on Facebook: "This is one of the hardest days in Italy's history for 10 years. Climate change has hit our nation and demands that we all change our ways. There are no excuses." "We knew that today would be the hardest day," Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni told Italian radio RTL 102.5. "We have a situation where very high temperatures are combined with wind, which makes using Canadair [firefighting aircraft] impossible." "We are following the situation, which is very delicate, minute by minute." Italian meteorologist and climate expert Giulio Betti told the BBC that the exceptional heatwave that has been blighting the south of Italy and the storms that affected parts of the north are "two sides of the same coin". "The northern regions, which were right in the middle of very fresh Atlantic air and intensely hot African air, became a perfect breeding ground for very intense storms," Mr Betti said. "What is striking [this year] is the intensity, frequency and duration of the heatwaves... And these have not always occurred." Several regions have asked the government to declare a state of emergency.



Last Line

"The terrorists succumbed to the overwhelming fire power of the troops after two of their members fell in the fire fight that ensued while the survivors fled to their hideout around Okpanam River."
-Director of Army Public Relations, Brigadier General Onyema Nwachukwu, relaying the feat Nigerian troops achieved after a fierce encounter with IPOB/ESN fighters yesterday at Fuji Junction, General Area in Asaba, Delta State.

What America owes Nigeria and Africa

Illyasu Gadu

Guest Writer

Today the United States of America (USA) stands indisputably as the most powerful nation on earth. This distinction is manifested in virtually all fields of human endeavour; economically, militarily, technologically and diplomatically. The US leads also in soft power; sports, culture, entertainment, education and in any other area of human activity imaginable.

The trajectory of US dominance of the world began in 1776 when the 13 original states rebelled from the colonial dominance of Britain and kicked the latter out, establishing their independence as the United States of America.

All along the way from its origins as a group of colonial settlements to date as a nation of 50 states along with its overseas possessions, Africans have played a major part in the rise of America. Indeed without Africans who were forcibly brought into America as slaves and made to work the sugar, tobacco, and cotton plantations, America would not be what it is today.

Long before the invention of the reaper, the combined harvesters and other cutting-edge inventions that revolutionised agriculture in America, it was the Africans whose rights were denied as slaves that were brutally and mercilessly deployed to work. Long and short of it, the foundation of America's agricultural revolution which eventually ensured the industrial take-off of America and the country's rise to economic greatness was made possible by Africans.

Down the years of American history from its foundations to date, Africans have contributed immeasurably in all facets of life which enables America to claim the excellence and exceptionalism which it shows off proudly to the world.

But has America meaningfully acknowledged this immense contribution of Africans to its history and most importantly has America recognised the pain, hurt and traumatic effects that Africans on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean had to bear for its rise to the greatness that it claims today?

First, let us crunch the dates and numbers.

Estimating that the first permanent American settlement by Europeans started in the late

Until and unless it changes its negative institutional and attitudinal approach to African issues, America will continue to bear the moral burden of a superpower with clay feet

1500s and that the first slaves arrived in what is today South Carolina in the 1600s until 1865 when it was officially abolished; it means that slavery existed in America for two centuries continuously.

Estimates vary but the number of slaves that were procured from Africa to America within this period including those who died on the horrendous journey through all kinds of ways must not be less than 20 million. Those who managed to survive the hellish sea journey to America had to begin to endure another life of unspeakable barbarities in the hands of their white American owners who denied them the benefit of humane recognition and treatment. Indeed, during the period of slavery, the statutes of all the American colonial states clearly stated that Africans were not to be regarded or treated as complete humans, thereby freeing their white owners from any compunction or conscience in treating them brutally.

And while Africans who were transported to America were being subjected to the worst form of inhuman treatment possible, Africa, the continent from which they were taken, was being depopulated of the most able hands. This devastation in terms of massive depopulation and the wars that were engendered to enable captives to be sold and taken to America to work in plantations set Africa back by centuries in its quest for development. This invariably

rendered Africa weak and unable to resist the forces of subsequent balkanization and colonialism of Africa which followed.

It is a matter of regret that America, which was built on the blood and sweat of Africans, has hardly taken any serious, constructive steps to engage Africans both in America and Africa to acknowledge and remedy this historical atrocity whose effects are still with us today and will continue into the future.

Contrast this American attitude to Africans to its treatment of the Jewish Holocaust and the massive continuing support for Jewish issues globally, which in terms of scale was not up to what Africans suffered. Also, take note of the gargantuan scale of meaningful and generous economic assistance America offered for the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War which helped launched the continent onto the path of quick economic recovery.

Incongruously America which has been on the backs of countries like Turkiye, Russia and China on human rights issues and their past historical events has not had the same moral courage to face up to and remedy its own ugly historical past in its treatment of Africans which till today negatively impacts on them globally.

It is time for America to cast off its pretence as far as Africa and Africans are concerned. This continent from which America drew a lot and continues to do so deserves to be treated better. Out of the 10 ethnic groups that were largely taken as slaves to America, six were from Nigeria.

We are not merely talking here about unquantifiable sums in monetary terms that America owes Africans in compensation for centuries of ill-treatment which persists to this day in various forms. We are talking more about the institutional and attitudinal mindset that has remained in the psyche of American governments and institutions over the years of treating Africans and their issues with paternalistic condescension. This informs the puny, token, half-hearted, drop-in-the-ocean so-called assistance America often offers Africa and Africans in contrast to what it does others.

America should get real and engage meaningfully for both its sake and for Africa. Until and unless it changes its negative institutional and attitudinal approach to African issues, America will continue to bear the moral burden of a superpower with clay feet.

...Gadu is a public affairs commentator

Sports Watch

Fulham bid £18m for Calvin Bassey



Calvin Bassey's potential move to Fulham FC appears to have hit a roadblock, despite the club reportedly agreeing to an £18 million fee with Ajax for the former Rangers star.

According to SkySports news reporter, Dharmesh Sheth, the Cottagers' pursuit of Southampton's outcast, Mohammed Salisu, could be why they hesitated to finalise the deal for Bassey.

Fulham are believed to be close to securing a £15 million transfer for Salisu, with personal terms being a critical factor in the decision, which would have the club sign either him or Bassey.

This has left the London-based club leaning towards signing the 24-year-old centre-back from Southampton, potentially jeopardising the deal with Bassey.

The Nigerian defender joined Ajax from Rangers last summer on a five-year deal worth just about £20 million, and he has however faced a lot of backlash during his time in Amsterdam.

Despite his relatively short stint with the Dutch club, Fulham's interest in the Nigerian international has been strong.

Salisu's situation at Southampton allows Fulham to bolster their defensive ranks. The Saints are reportedly looking to cash in on the 24-year-old, who has one year left on his contract, after being excluded from the squad due to concerns over his commitment.

Personal conditions and club considerations will be crucial in choosing which centre-back Fulham finally gets for their Premier League campaign as the transfer story progresses.