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Mock accreditation: CSOs condemn arrest of observer

The Coalition of Civil Society Organizations working on a credible election under the aegis of Situation Room on Monday condemned in strong terms the arrest and detention of one of the Accredited Observer by personnel of the Department of State Security (DSS) in Kogi State during the just concluded Mock

Accreditation exercise initiated by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The mock accreditation exercise, which took place on Saturday, 4th February 2023, across 436 designated polling units across the 109 senatorial districts in the country, 12 in each State and 4 in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), was aimed at demonstrating the functionality of the Bimodal

Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) which is the technology it intends to use for the 2023 General Elections.

According to the Coalition, the Election Observer was "accused of taking pictures at the location of the Mock accreditation. The DSS claimed to have arrested him for his safety and only released him after high-level intervention by the INEC chairman, who confirmed that

Observers were entitled to be at the Mock Accreditation locations.

"Situation Room notes that the Resident Electoral Commissioner for the State, Dr Hale Longpet, took no action to restrain the security agency from their infringement of the right of Observers to observe the elections."

Situation Room is concerned that this incident may repeat during the general

elections with security agencies interfering with the right of Observers to observe elections on polling day.

To this end, the Coalition stressed the need for INEC authorities to re-emphasize and widely disseminate the right of duly accredited Observers to observe the 2023 elections to assure citizens of INEC's commitment to organise free polls.

They also stressed the need

for security agencies to respect Observers' rights to observe elections and refrain from interfering with these well-established rights.

In a statement jointly signed by the Convener, Ene Obi, Asma'u Kids, and James Ugochukwu, the Situation Room lamented that the constraints of cash crunch on individuals might impact voter turnout.

Hence, urged Federal **Continued on page 1**



Governor Simon Bako Lalong (CON) being assisted by his Deputy Prof. Sonni Gwanle Tyoden, SGS, Prof. Danladi Abok Atu while Sultan of Sokoto and traditional rulers watch the unveiling of the Gazette on creation of Districts and Chiefdoms during 'the Plateau State at 47 and the Forgiveness Day' celebration yesterday at the Rwang Pam Township Stadium, Jos.

Photo: DANLADI DUK

Some dismissed Police officers have dragged the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Usman Alkali Baba, before National Industrial Court (NIC) asking the court to commit him to prison for "disobeying court order", calling for their reinstatement back into service.

Dismissed police officers drag IGP to court

The officer who were forcefully retired have asked the IGP, the Police Service Commission (PSC) and Force Secretary to show reasons they should not be committed to prison over their refusal to reinstate them after the court order.

The Officers through their Counsel, Godwin Okoro, have stated that they were forcefully retired from the force despite the court judgment, ordering the Nigeria Police Force and the Police Service Commission not to forcefully retire them as they have not spent 60

years or spent 35 years in service.

The aggrieved Police Officers in a statement signed by Emmanuel Idris, on behalf of other Concerned officers, and made available to journalists in Akure, Ondo state capital, explained that

they were forcefully retired from the force despite the court judgment, saying the IGP and other relevant authorities had failed to obey the court judgment.

Idris, in the statement, said the court has delivered the judgment in April 2022 and the defendants were yet

to implement the judgment, which was delivered by Justice Oyewumi Oyebiola of the NICN.

The statement read, "We are members and graduates of Course 33, 34 and 35 of the Police Academy, we were forcefully retired from the force when we were yet to attain the age of 60years

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Mock accreditation: CSOs condemn arrest of observer

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Government on the need to work hard and significantly reduce the debilitating effect of the recent currency change, as politicians who have reportedly developed capacity and access to cash from the banks could use it in furtherance of vote buying and inducement to a cash-hungry voting population.

While noting that the BVAS has been used in the Anambra, Ekiti, and Osun States off-cycle Governorship Elections, the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, through its deployed Field Observers and other Election Observer Networks, acknowledged that the exercise was conducted in a largely orderly and peaceful manner across the States.

They observed that in most Polling Units (PUs) visited, INEC officials arrived on time. The accreditation exercise commenced at the given time of 9:00 am, while other INEC officials arrived between 10 am and 11 am in some polling units, including Ibaji Local Government Area (LGA) in Kogi State; Orumba North

LGA, Anambra State; Wukari LGA, Taraba State and Ado/Ota LGA of Ogun State.

The Situation Room Observers noted the effective use of BVAS in several areas where a test run was held. There was the presence of security personnel from the Nigeria Police, Department of State Services, and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps in most PUs.

The Coalition also observed Voter turnout in several States in the North of the country was high, while in the FCT, turnout was markedly low at Area 10/Post Office polling unit in the city centre.

Only 16 out of a total of 2,052 on the voters' register showed up for accreditation, adding that generally, priority voting was recognised, and Persons with disabilities were given priority.

On the functionality of the BVAS, the "Situation Room observed a considerable improvement with the use of the BVAS from the last off-cycle Governorship elections in Anambra, Ekiti, and Osun States.

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and some were retired when they were yet to spend 35years in the police force.

"We approached the National Industrial Court, Abuja to challenge the action of the force against us and the court presided over by Hon. Justice Oyewumi Oyebiola gave an order that we should be reinstated but to our surprise, the police authority has not obeyed the court judgment up till today.

"It could be noted that the police took action against us because of the issue on our date of first appointment and the issue has been cleared by the court and there was no appeal on the court judgment.

"Incidentally the Police authority had implemented the earlier judgments of the same court involved other police officers, but for inexplicable reasons, the authority refused bluntly to obey the judgment."

According to him, the Industrial Court presided by Justice Oyebiola Oyewumi had in suit No. NICN/ABJ/281/2021 filed

Dismissed police officers drag IGP to court

by Messrs Egong Egwu Egong, Omeh Felix Okechukwu, Paul Obot Umoh and Galadima Bello had approached the court seeking an order to nullify their retirement from service by the Nigeria Police Force and the Police service Commission PSC.

They prayed the court that the IGP and the Police Service Commission (PSC) and the Force Secretary of the Police should reinstate them after being forcefully retired from office.

Alkali Baba, signed by the court registrar, Mrs Rufai Zainab Ahmed, dated January 23, 2023, warned IGP and other defendants against disobeying court judgment or face the consequences which is imprisonment.

The notice read; "Take Notice that unless you obey the directions contained in the Certificate of Judgment of Court dated the 19th day of April 2022 you will be guilty of contempt of Court and will be liable to be committed to prison."



Alkali

Group accuses el-Rufai of pursuing selfish agenda

A group, known as Arewa Unity and Development Movement (AUDM) has accused Kaduna State Governor, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai of pursuing selfish agenda against the overall interest of the North.

trivial, but coercing every individual, group or region into his selfish agenda stands logic upside-down".

The AUDM alleged that El-Rufai is insulting the Northern elders and making abusive statements just because the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, promised him the position of National Security Adviser (NSA).

"Our position, however, is that the governor should know that any ambition being pursued by any individual must be moderated by the thinking of the society to which such individual belongs.

In a statement issued by the Convener, Isa Hassan Jafaru, Monday, the AUDM cautioned the governor not to take personal interests above that of the region and country.

"El-Rufai is a known self centered individual and a divisive politician who always acting according to the dictates of his interest and nothing more.

The group said: "We have been reliably informed of the promise made to Governor Nasir El-Rufai by Asiwaju Bola Tinubu which is to the effect that he would be appointed the next NSA should Tinubu wins this month's election.

"As we speak today, the general consensus in the North is that the best person that should be supported to become the next president of the country, and among all the four candidates is Atiku Abubakar. He is the best and well positioned to rescue the country. This is why we are calling on Governor El-Rufai to have a rethink rather than pursuing his personal and parochial interest."

"It is within the rights of El-Rufai as guaranteed by the constitution of the country to accept any promise, no matter how

The group also cautioned the governor to refrain from abusing leaders and elders of the region by considering his political future which could be jeopardised.

The group said El-Rufai had said several negative things against Tinubu in the past, and once vowed that he would never deputise for a drug baron as president.

Speaking exclusively with Daily Mail on 13 May, 2019, El-Rufai, through one of his aides said: "Nigerians know who a drug baron is. Nigerians know who was arrested and convicted of drug peddling in the US some decades ago.

He appreciated the special guests, traditional rulers, religious leaders, former Governors, and other stakeholders that graced the occasion.

The group cautioned the governor to desist henceforth from insulting northern leaders and Mr. President just because he nurses an inordinate and selfish ambition against that of the region and the country.

"The government is working assiduously to restore normalcy to these critical enablers of economic activity and to take added measures, where necessary, to alleviate the pains of Nigerians.

"Recall, ladies and gentlemen, that after his meeting with Progressives' Governors on Friday, President Buhari urged citizens to give him a seven-day window to resolve the currency crunch that has emanated from the implementation of the Naira redesign policy.

"Unfortunately, on Monday, some opposition political parties ran to court to obtain an injunction restraining Mr. President and the CBN from extending the Feb. 10 deadline for Nigerians to exchange their old notes for new ones.

Naira redesign: FG blasts opposition parties



By Palang Kasmi

The Federal Government has blasted some opposition parties for rushing to court for an injunction to restrain President Muhammadu Buhari and Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Godwin Emefiele from extending the Feb.10 deadline for cash swap.

playing a political game with the redesign of the naira, claiming the "unscrupulous" parties were against any action that could reduce the pains being experienced by Nigerians.

The Minister of Information and Culture Lai Mohammed took swipes at the affected

opposition parties at the 23rd PMB Administration Scorecard series in Abuja.

He said: "Let me use this opportunity to assure Nigerians that the Federal Government is mindful of the inconveniences currently being endured by citizens as a result of fuel supply disruptions and the recent redesigning of some Naira notes.

Abubakar, Onaiyekan call for sustenance of Plateau Peace Day

By PALANG KASMI

The Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar (III) and the Arch Bishop Emeritus of Abuja, John Cardinal Olorunfemi Onaiyekan have called for the sustenance of the Plateau and Forgiveness Day.

They made the call in Jos on Tuesday February 7th 2023, at the at the Rwang Pam Township Stadium while marking the 2023 celebrations of the day.

In his remarks at the forum, the Sultan, who commended the Governor for initiating the day, said without peace,

there can be no development in any society.

"You can't do anything in your life without peace, and without peace, you cannot forgive".

Archbishop Onaiyekan represented by Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama said he is happy to be back home to Jos and said he was also part of the first celebrations initiated by the Governor.

He said peace and forgiveness are twins which cannot be separated and hoped that the day will be sustained.

He commended all those who are working to stem the

tide of crisis and hostilities on the Plateau and the country.

Governor Lalong, accompanied by former Governors, traditional rulers present performed the unveiling of the Gazette on the creation of Districts and Chiefdoms, handing over of Faith Based Schools to original owners, Unveiling of Plateau State Symbols and identity and some symbolic Presentations.

Among the symbolic presentations the Governor did was the unveiling of a new Logo, State Anthem, and new emblem to replace the one instituted by the Military.

Lalong expressed happiness on the level of



Sa'ad

peace and harmonious coexistence that has taken place in the state as the state marks its 47th years of existence.



Business & Economy

Naira redesign and Nigeria's future

This is one of the best policies this administration has formulated and is delivering on. Of course, people will cry and shout but it is in the overall best interest of the nation. [Abdulmumin S. Balogun](#) writes.

ALREADY, one of the presidential candidates that has been alleged to use huge sums of money to buy votes and mobilise thugs to force people to go his way, is attacking President Muhammadu Buhari, his own party leader, because of this policy. It could therefore be summed that the policy is clearly not self-serving or in the interest of the party. It is altruistic!

Bandits, fraudsters (AKA 419ers) and terrorists trade with huge quantities of cash – which they collect as booty or ransom, purchase arms and properties with, and return to terrorise or oppress the people. In Nigeria now, excess cash in the system equals easy access to cash by terrorists and criminals, and undeterred access to it equals lack of peace.

The economy has been facing serious challenges because many people have deliberately refused to be included in the mainstream banking sector, even with the introduction of easy banking services -which include on-the-spot accounts opening and withdrawal through the POS and other mobile channels.

By running away from banking services the country cannot calculate adequately its Gross National Product or Gross Domestic Product, or its per capita growth.

It simply implies that what Nigeria has been doing is guesstimating its GDP, GNP and other growth indices. That is probably why our titling as the largest economy in Africa has had little impact on the life of the average citizen.

Have you ever tried, as a business owner, to secure a bank loan? Well I have. And it is harrowing.

Traditionally, banks are supposed to trade on the confidence they have on the characters of everyday individuals but in Nigeria they do not! One of the reasons is that they are usually unable to track adequately, what borrowers do with loans. Some people use the loans for other purposes – not what they applied to use it for, and dodge the banking sector by trading in cash continuously. Loan recovery, in order to recirculate money and



empower others to start or grow their businesses, therefore, becomes impossible.

Are you aware that the Covid19 NIRSAL loan disbursement suffered because deposit money banks, DMBs, which finance the loan from their profits, withdrew because they were not posting profits?

Do you know that many positive and shiny balance sheets posted by banks annually are doctored, because they do not make profits from production activities; rather they make 'doubtful' profits from moving money from one place to another and charging commissions on them?

With more money in the banks the banks will be forced to lend more at friendly rates because they will be able to track how lenders use the money in order to make informed recovery decisions. Recently, a former accountant general of the federation was

accused of a total graft figure of N109bn.

The late former Chief of the Air Staff was reported to be

"Are you aware that the Covid19 NIRSAL loan disbursement suffered because deposit money banks, DMBs, which finance the loan from their profits, withdrew because they were not posting profits? Do you know that many positive and shiny balance sheets posted by banks annually are doctored, because they do not make profits from production activities; rather they make 'doubtful' profits from moving money from one place to another and charging commissions on them? With more money in the banks the banks will be forced to lend more at friendly rates because they will be able to track how lenders use the money in order to make informed recovery decisions. Recently, a former accountant general of the federation was accused of a total graft figure of N109bn."

removing N600 million every month from the monthly allocation to the Air Force. These allegations of senseless criminality could only be conceived because all transactions are not forced to take place through the banking system. At a point, money changers became the ones determining and creating new but poor values for the Naira! That should not continue.

Counterfeiters will be forced to stop, however briefly, because Nigeria is moving into semi-cashlessness. The less the importance of cash, the less the activities of these people. Imagine being paid, as a farmer for several bags of grains in mint currency that are counterfeits! It has happened and could happen again. I can go on and on.

This policy is one of the very best policies Nigeria has ever had. If the government wants it to work better all it needs to do is to withhold huge supplies of the new currency to the banks and collect much more old currencies from the citizens in order to stop inflation and criminality in its tracks.

If someone kidnaps another today and asks for N3m ransom – which will take forever to gather because withdrawal limits have been reduced and payouts from accounts tracked, he, the kidnapper, will gradually pull out of that way of life!

And how does the terrorist get more money to buy arms if the banks do not allow excess cash in the hands of people who he will kidnap for a ransom? Yes, we will suffer and complain. But like all giant steps that must be taken, the initial discomfort will lead to a good ending.

In fact the biggest saboteurs of the banking and financial reform going on are the legislators at the National Assembly who called for a review of the withdrawal limit upward. What is wrong in doing bank transfers for all transactions? A country like Nigeria, where almost everyone in public office is stealing, needs to go totally or partially cashless so that all transactions can be tracked and punishments and taxes properly applied and extracted.

The villager and local trader will now be properly included in the banking sector, with this new policy. And soon, we will all realise that those petty traders and farmers who we see as uneducated can actually transact without keeping cash.

Let's endure the discomforts of this policy and currency change in order to live a better and safer life as Nigerians.

We need a better global reputation that will attract huge foreign investments. This could be the magic wand!



Business & Economy

FG spends N613bn Sukuk loan on roads, bridges

THE Federal Government has disclosed that it spent N612.56bn for the construction and rehabilitation of 77 road projects and 23 bridges with funds raised through through Sovereign Sukuk.

This was made known by the Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Dr Zainab Ahmed, recently at the symbolic cheque presentation ceremony of the 2022 Sovereign Sukuk Issue proceeds of N130bn to the Ministry of Works and Housing and the Federal Capital Territory Administration.

According to the minister, while 71 road projects and four bridges were under the purview of the Ministry of Works and Housing, six road projects and 19 bridges were handled by the FCTA.

She said, "As at date, this administration has invested the sum of N612.557bn raised through sovereign sukuk between 2017 and 2021 for the construction and rehabilitation of key economic road projects in the six geo-political zones and the Federal Capital Territory.

"In real terms, the amount has been used to construct and rehabilitate sections of 71 road projects covering 2,808.06 kilometers and four bridges by the FMWH and sections of six road projects covering 99 kilometers and 19 bridges by the FCTA."

She further disclosed that from the N130bn raised from the sukuk issued in 2022, the Ministry of Works and Housing got N110bn while FCTA got N20bn for road and bridge projects.

The finance minister said, "The FMWH and FCTA will be sharing the 2022 Sukuk Issue Proceeds of N130bn, which was successfully issued by the Debt Management Office on behalf of the Federal Government of Nigeria on December 02, 2022 as follows: Federal Ministry of Works and Housing - N110,000,000,000.00 and Federal Capital Territory Administration - N20,000,000,000.00.

"The 2022 Sovereign Sukuk of N130bn will be released as part of the Capital Expenditure in the 2022 Appropriation Act, which has been extended by the National Assembly to March 31, 2023."

She also noted that as of November 2022, N1.88tn had been released as Capital Expenditure, representing about 40 per cent performance when compared to the total Capital Budget of N4.7tn.

She then explained that this low capital expenditure performance led to the extension of the fiscal period to implement the capital component of the 2022 Budget.

The Director-General, DMO,



Ahmed

Patience Oniha, noted that the Sukuk can be issued to fund any fixed asset in the country as designated by the finance minister.

She also noted that the debt office started issuing the Sukuk in a challenging environment, but the issue process became better over the years.

The Minister of Works and

Housing, Babatunde Fashola, lauded the sukuk bond initiative, describing it as a bailout instrument that has helped in fixing Nigerian roads in the country.

He noted that he inherited a sum of N18bn as total capital budget for roads in 2015 but the figure rose to about N266bn with the introduction of the Sukuk.

Nigeria remains dumping ground for solar energy materials

THE Africa Coalition for Sustainable Energy Access (ACSEA), an NGO, has expressed concern as Nigeria has remained a dumping ground for solar energy materials.

Executive Director of ACSEA, Dr Godwin Ojo, said this at a Stakeholders Validation and Training Workshop in Abuja.

The workshop, which was focused on renewable energy system, was organised by Lift

Humanity Foundation (LHF), an NGO, in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Ojo, who also expressed worries over high level of deteriorating state of technology in the country, said that access to the technology was very low and has become a challenge for Nigeria.

He said that releasing of emission from dirty oil, gas and other energy products was advancing climate change

CENTRAL Bank of Nigeria (CBN) said it has expanded the number of participating agents in cash swap initiatives, including some micro finance banks to reduce pressure in the banking halls and ensure that the new naira notes circulate across the country.

The Governor, CBN, Godwin Emefiele who disclosed this recently during press conference on the on the Benefits of the Naira Redesign Policy said apex bank has commenced a nationwide sensitization through the Print and Electronic Media to create an awareness on the redesigned Notes to Nigerians including collaboration with the National Orientation Agency to reach all Nigerians across multiple channels.

He said CBN has deployed 30,000 Super Agents nationwide to assist in Cash Swap initiative in the hinterlands, rural areas, and regions underserved by banks in the Country to ensure that the weak and vulnerable ones amongst us can swap/exchange their old notes.

Listing benefits of a Currency Redesign Policy, Emefiele said "the currency redesign policies are designed by countries to strengthen the performance of

CBN, MFBs, agents in cash swap initiatives

key macroeconomic parameters and equally combat social improprieties. "Chiefly, it is expected to reduce the amount of cash in underground or illicit economy, truncate the activities of racketeers, and obliterate rent-seeking businesses in the black market.

"By reducing currency outside banks, it will shrink

money stock and accordingly lower the long-run path of inflation."

Speaking further he said "Effectively implemented currency redesign large causes a fall in money supply. "This will lead to reduction of value of money in circulation and a deceleration of the velocity of money in the economy leading to less pressures on domestic prices.



Emefiele

Petrol prices may drop as NNPC, IPMAN agrees

THERE is a ray of hope that the current petrol scarcity in the country may not only lessen, but the product become cheaper with the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC) saying it will deal with the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN).

Stakeholders in the downstream sub sector of the oil and gas industry recently met with different security agencies in a determined effort to resolve the problem.

Mike Osatuyi, IPMAN's National Operations Controller, who confirmed the development also said the IPMAN, is not planning to shut down operations following Federal Governments announcement to enforce N195 a liter pump price for the product.

Under the agreement, Osatuyi said that members of the Association will begin to get supply from the direct the Nigeria National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL).

He said that going forward, the independent marketers, in

breaking the festering scarcity, has received assurance of direct supply of petrol from the NNPC.

The moves came on the heels of a critical meeting between NNPC, Major Marketers Association of Nigeria, MOMAN, IPMAN, Depots and Petroleum Products Marketers Association of Nigeria (DAPPMAN) and the Department of State Services (DSS) amongst others.

The National Operations Controller, said that the NNPC has agreed to sell petrol directly to IPMAN members at the regulated official price, rather than routing products through third parties, who had been severally fingered as being behind inflated wholesale supply prices.

Osatuyi said direct sale of products to independent marketers "will bring down the price of the product", noting that direct sale of products to independent marketers will lead to immediate reversal of retail prices to regulated retail price.

He said: "I can tell you that the NNPC have agreed to be

and global warming.

According to him, Nigeria has access to solar energy from the sun, but cannot harness resources due to bad condition of the technologies in the country.

He added that the best way to tackle the issue was through a strong collaboration among national international communities.

Ojo called on government at all levels, private and other

relevant stakeholders to intensify effort to ensure a strong assessment of renewable energy governance in the country.

He said that the stakeholders were advocating for centered energy transition system, adding that everyone should be involve.

"We are asking for a different modern of energy system where you and I who are end users can benefit.

"The reason is that our indigenous technology is deteriorate the issue is about technology advancement, our technology is not function well.

"In industrialised countries, the technology is advanced and are working effectively because they are being maintained.

"While in Nigeria, it is still very low to access because they are very few, and most of them are in bad shape," he said.

"Individuals, private sectors and government of all levels should be involve to ensure a diversify energy system, energy is in the hands of everyone," he said.

The Executive Secretary of LHF, Mr Pius Oko, said that the workshop was a training for researchers especially civil society organisations (CSOs).

"We are bringing multi stakeholders together to validate this, already we have been on the process of providing a report since last year.

Oko said that the training was focused on how data could be assessed and accessed, using more proffer methodology for the renewable energy governance in the country.

Mr Okon Ekpenyong, Director of Linkages, Research and Consultancy, Energy Commission of Nigeria (ECN), was represented by Mrs Jennifer Ekele, Technical Officer, said that the initiative would promote energy sector in the country.

Ekpenyong said that the commission was strongly supporting the programme.



Kyari

giving IPMAN petrol directly and not through a third party.

"The Federal Government of Nigeria and the Inspector General of Police should call the federal task force on petroleum products to order as their recent actions is geared towards intimidation and exploitation.

"IPMAN will work with them in a peaceful and friendly atmosphere to fish out fraudulent members among IPMAN members that can be

proven but not exploitative agenda."

The IPMAN on Sunday debunked the insinuations that marketers are getting set to shut down operations beginning from Monday once the government starts the enforcement of N195/litre pump price.

Osatuyi said it became necessary to debunk the insinuation that IPMAN members planned to shut down their stations.



RS' N10.1 trillion collection – major matters arising

FIRST off, our Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) – soon to be known as Nigeria Revenue Service to capture the fact that revenue everywhere including online (not only inland) must be captured – must be commended on their unprecedented and superlative achievement of N10.1 Trillion collection for the year 2022. Honestly, in our country, replete with bad news, this is one news that gladdened my heart and for which I have heard or read little commentary since announced, writes TOPE FASUA.

THE Muhammad Nami-led service bested itself in a performance that is also reflective of the ongoing economic recovery, after the second slump due to COVID-19 under President Buhari's leadership since 2015. We had never neared that double digit in the trillions of Naira.

Let us do a quick rundown of our revenue performance over the years since the year 2000. In that year as the civilians settled into government, the FIRS collected a total of N455 billion across the board. By 2001, this increased to N587 billion. In 2002, collections dipped to N434 billion. But in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006, the numbers increased to N703 billion, N1.19 trillion, N1.7 trillion and N1.87 trillion respectively, before we saw another slight dip in 2007 to N1.85 trillion. Due to the performance of the crude oil sector, the FIRS witnessed a leap in collections in 2008 when it hauled in N2.97 trillion.

But a dip occurred in 2009, when collections slumped to N2.2 trillion. The growth trajectory was resumed the year after and maintained for another two years when in 2010, 2011 and 2012, the FIRS collected the sums of N2.8 trillion, N4.62 trillion and N5.007 trillion respectively, before another dip to N4.8 trillion and N4.7 trillion in 2013 and 2014 respectively. The year 2015 was a transition year, and it witnessed underperformance by the FIRS when collections slumped to N3.7 trillion. An economic recession would follow in 2016 which further collapsed collections to N3.3 trillion (by then the lowest collection in seven years).

Luckily, revenue collections improved the year after, when the FIRS collected N4.03 trillion, increasing in 2018 to N5.3 trillion, and dipping slightly to N5.26 trillion and N4.9 trillion in 2019 and 2020 (the COVID-19 year). Global economic recovery and resilience on the part of the service saw to an increase in collections to N6.45 trillion in 2021 and now, a superlative performance of N10.1 trillion in 2022. A graphical representation of the journey is presented below:

Matters Arising

1. Growths in collection must be discounted for inflation and devaluation.

Whereas I will commend the FIRS Chairman and his team for being focused and having ploughed through a very difficult time (COVID-19), we all must note that the growing figures must be discounted for yearly inflation and devaluation. Just as the Naira gets weaker and weaker in the hands of the common man, so also is it getting weaker in terms of the public goods it can procure for the masses. Indeed, it may be prudent to represent these numbers in dollar terms, since our economy is quite externalised and linked to the dollar. If we do this, the excitement may wane. It must however be noticed that despite inflation and devaluation, the period of 2014 to 2017 were years of decreased revenue even in absolute terms.

That meant inefficiency and low value for Nigerians. This collection of N10.1 trillion happened in a year that we didn't have shocking



devaluation – at least not officially. Therefore, it passes the test for good performance. But we must keep challenging ourselves. Rather than the political capture and executive tardiness that has held Nigeria down so far, a more articulate and focused approach could lead to significant leaps in FIRS collections. I see that figure hitting N20 Trillion soon. Customs collections, which is part of what FIRS accounts for, is impacted by Naira devaluation, and must be benchmarked appropriately so that we know when we are making real progress.

2. Non-oil sector is here to stay

The Nigerian government has been very deliberate about the need for the economy to be diversified. It was however impossible to achieve this under the Obasanjo administration and it remained a struggle throughout the Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations. We could however say this is now a reality given that we are seeing a reversal of fortunes so to speak. The oil sector used to contribute almost 65% of FIRS collections in the early 2000s. In the year 2011, non-oil contributed N1.56 trillion as against oil sector contribution of N3.071 trillion (almost double). 2022 performance shows that non-oil collections have now surpassed what accrues from oil. Oil sector in 2022 contributed N4.09 trillion, while non-oil accounted for N5.96 trillion (59%). This is good if it depicts the seriousness of our economic diversification efforts, and FIRS's ingenuousness in going after those who should pay taxes. However, it also may belie the fact that Nigeria really lost grounds in the oil sector in 2022 and for some years now, with production dipping to somewhere below 1,000,000 barrels per day as against our OPEC quota of at least 1.6 million barrels a day. Thankfully, with the contracting of Tompolo's Tantita Security Services company, we now understand that crude oil production has ramped up considerably. With some luck, production from the Gombe/Bauchi axis may weigh in and 2023 should tell a different story, for good. We can walk and chew gum at the same

time. We should be optimising both sectors – oil and non-oil.

3. Silo mentality affecting Nigeria very adversely

It must be said that silo mentality and ego trips among government functionaries was a major problem. This is more so under the Buhari administration. I wrote about that recently when the suggestion (indeed the recommendation per the 2022 Finance Act), of an introduction of 5% tax on telecommunications was stepped down ostensibly on the orders of, or with the influence of the Minister for Communications and Digital Economy. I felt this was an overkill and powerplay by Sheikh Isa Pantami and an embarrassment to Dr Zainab Ahmed who had agonized for too long about low revenues and insisted that what Nigeria has is a revenue problem more than anything else. There she was, trying to do something about it with what could be considered a good tax – easy to pay, may not be felt, and easy to collect – and being shut down summarily on national TV. This time, the FIRS Chairman could not help but express his frustration at some of what he had experienced so far, including the tendency for agencies of government to sue each other and to compete for what is beyond their remit. Hear him as quoted in *ThisDay* newspaper of 24 January:

"We would have actually done better, but for several issues, some of which are political and very sensitive to discuss in the public domain... But the most important one is distractions from certain interests within the federal government itself and the sub-nationals or people who want to do what FIRS is doing – in other words, those that want to perform the statutory functions of FIRS of assessing, collecting, and accounting for taxes in Nigeria... These are not just mere issues but people instituting legal actions against FIRS to further distract us. People instituting, even federal agencies instituting legal actions against laws that have been passed by the National Assembly and signed into law by Mr. President... So, these challenges impacted negatively, because you see on so many occasions people writing in to find out that 'tax A, we are confused, we don't know who to pay to now, that there's a court ruling to restrict you from collecting such taxes'. So, this really impacted negatively on what we did last year... We appeal to

them to continue to invest the little we are generating judiciously so that they are able to encourage taxpayers to continue to comply and pay more so that together we are able to fix Nigeria."

I totally agree with Nami. The dysfunction in the current administration is very sad to watch. Who knows how many billions Nigerian masses lost to some fat cat somewhere as a result of infighting? Nami also stated briefly that N1.8 Trillion of waivers under several arrangements, were granted in the year.

4. Waivers, concessions and forbearances need to be curbed

Flowing from 3 above, it will be good for government to have a relook at the system of waivers because this nation – with a huge debt overhang – can ill afford them. We cannot be servicing debts with over 90% of our revenue and be gifting some away at will for any reason. Personally, I think the idea of exempting companies with turnover of less than N25 million and below from all forms of taxes is preposterous and needs to be reviewed. Nigeria is an open sesame and companies are thriving here. Even if it was minimum taxation, I believe we should get. There is a strong correlation or even causation between tax responsibility and economic development. Indeed, I am proposing that we start to operate as they do in the UK and UAE (countries in which I have done business corporately).

In these countries, they don't joke with their taxes. The UAE is even introducing company income tax by June 2023. That is an Arabic country reforming. In these two countries anyway, no company can do any business or even operate a bank account in any given year except they file company returns. And the company house (like our own Corporate Affairs Commission) will not collect your returns unless you show evidence of tax payment – including remittance of your staff PAYE and National Insurance. Note that the idea of Annual Returns also has security implications as it is primarily meant to be an update of company address and director or circumstance change in a given year. This is precious data. And data is king today. Anyway, in both countries that I've mentioned, as it also happens in every serious country, your bank will close down your company account if you don't supply your annual return after a deadline every year. This is what happened to Peter Obi's Next International UK Limited. If Nigeria could

effect this policy, company income tax collection will explode.

5. Are Nigerians paying too much taxes already?

There's also this argument flowing from five above, about whether Nigerians are already overtaxed as a result of multiple agencies and even non-state actors shaking everybody down. There was recently a short clip of a transporter of farm products in my Ondo State, who had to pay dues to about 60 agencies to do his business. There is also the popular knowledge that 'agberos', or those who work for transport unions around Nigeria, rake in billions of Naira daily. I want to add that I disagree though, with Messrs Taiwo Oyedele, Andrew Nevin, and others who believe that Nigerians are already overtaxed. Whereas we could define 'taxes' as every statutory payment that Nigerians are obliged to pay to government – including rents, rates, dues, duties, fees, levies, fines and others – I believe that it is dangerous to sell the idea to our publics that they are overtaxed already. Not many people are subjected to the multiple taxes that we complain about. And Nigerians do not pay anything near what people pay abroad. Dr Nevin argues that because Nigerians have to build their own infrastructure, we are already overtaxed. However, the idea of obligations to the state is about promoting responsible citizenship. We cannot short-cut that process. Most developed countries are where they are because their citizens feel obliged to support government – to a good degree – by contributing their quotas by way of those taxes, fees, fines, duties etc., and thereby promoting collective development. Our intellectuals should try to take a long view and not discourage that larger, noble objective.

The truth is that most Nigerians pay nothing. Most companies underpay taxes. Most people underpay. Even those charged with enforcement are more sympathetic with payers than being strict with their jobs. It is a fact that our governments have disappointed the people for too long with their ostentation and wrong choices. Still, we should not give up on our nation, promote the disconnection of the citizens from the country, and the eventual disintegration of our country.

Politics

Lalong commended over payment of salaries, pension

THE Chairman of the All Progressives Congress Plateau State Chapter, Hon. Rufus Bature has commended the Plateau State Governor, Rt. Hon. Simon Bako Lalong over the payment of backlog of workers' salaries and for being up to date in the payment of pension to retired civil servants in the state.

The APC Chairman said he is quite delighted by the confirmation by both the Commissioner of Finance, Mrs Regina Soemlat and the Accountant General of the state, Dr. Cyril Tsenyil that the government has paid workers' salaries and Third Party deductions up to December 2022 while it is working earnestly to pay that January very soon.

According to Bature, as a mark of respect for senior citizens who have served the state diligently and have retired, the government, under the Captain of the Rescue Administration, has been very prompt in paying their pensions.

The APC state Chairman was delighted that inspite of the economic downturn being experienced by the country which has led to a drastic fall in revenue allocation to the state, Gov. Lalong has been able to fulfil his obligations to



Lalong

Hon. Rufus Bature thanked the civil servants who are the engine room of government for their patience and understanding, and charged them to reciprocate the gesture by putting in their best in their various places of work.

It may be recalled that the Lalong administration on assumption of office in May 2015, cleared the backlog of workers' salaries left by his predecessor, for upward of six to seven months and had

remained consistent in the payment of salaries as and when due, thus earning him the appellation of 'Governor Alert' by the workers.

Sokoto APC will not engage in violence

From ANENE AIKE, Sokoto

THE All Progressives Congress (APC) in Sokoto State has all that its supporters will not engage in political violence even as the party continues with its electioneering campaigns

towards the 2023 general elections.

The Sokoto State All Progressives Congress Campaign Council has re-emphasized its commitment to embarking on an electioneering campaign without violence despite

LP candidate explains absence at Obi's welcome party

From GYANG PAM, Yola

"So you see gentlemen of the press, I am the leader of the party in the state but as you can see, arrangements for the presidential candidate's visit was done without us, we were sidelined," he said.

He said by this development and Lawal's stance, it shows Obi as the presidential

candidate while there are controversies over other positions because the plan is to support the opposition candidates.

Umar blasted Babachir as one who left the APC that made him and could not gain entry into the PDP, so he has bulldozed his way into the Labour Party.



Obi

Wamakko - Wamakko

intense provocation from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the state.

In his speech immediately after the party's Council meeting the party's leader in Sokoto, Sen. Aliyu Magatakarda Wammakko re-emphasized its commitment to embarking on an electioneering campaign without violence in the state.

Addressing newsmen, the APC Sokoto leader who is also the former Governor of the State rejected all insinuations and allegations to the effect that the APC is responsible for the increased, repeated violent clashes and counter-clashes during political campaigns in the last one month in the state.

This followed the outcome of a briefing by the heads of security agencies with political parties in the state, which was attended by State APC Chairman, Isa Sadiq Achida and the caucus meeting held by the party.

It will be recalled that violent clashes have become a regular occurrence within the state recently to the extent that Sultan Sa'ad Abubakar only a few days ago also called

on politicians to carry out their campaigns in a peaceful and violence-free manner.

The leader who is also the APC Senatorial candidate for Sokoto South Senatorial zone reassured party faithfuls, residents and the general public of the party's resolve to commit itself to a very peaceful electioneering campaign.

He called on the PDP to endeavor to disarm its youth wing and educate them on the need for peace and tranquility as we approach the general elections.

"The All Progressives Congress as a party is made up of decent and peace loving citizens and we encourage all residents of Sokoto to abhor violence and embrace peace during this period and in future," he said.

Our Correspondent also reports that the caucus meeting was attended by the Director General of the All Progressives Congress Campaign Council, and Minister of Police Affairs, Maigari Dingyadi and other party bigwigs.

Expert calls on INEC to urgently upgrade BVAS



Yakubu

THE Managing Director of New Horizons, Mr Tim Akano, has called on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to urgently upgrade the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) ahead of the forthcoming polls.

Akano, who heads the computer training firm, made the call on Saturday in Lagos at the celebration of the World Data Privacy Day organised by Data and Knowledge Information Privacy Protection Initiative (DKIPPI).

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that the theme of the

celebrations is "Understanding Privacy and Online Risk in Digital World Today".

He said that regardless of the performance of BVAS in the next three weeks, there was a need for an urgent upgrade against the background of the over-voting recorded in the recent Osun governorship election.

According to Akano, 2023 World Data Privacy Day celebration could not have come at a better time.

"This will be the first time in the history of elections in Nigeria that the country would rely on wholesale technology to choose its

next president.

"Will BVAS lead to a breakthrough or a breakdown of Nigeria even though BVAS end-to-end encryption security offers more than a kilogramme of comfort and confidence?"

"It is good and helpful nonetheless and it is in the best interest of INEC in particular and Nigeria in general to pay more than a casual attention to what we call Man -in-the -Middle attack or a replay attack which dark hackers can exploit to intercept, modify and retransmit the election data while in motion or transit," he pointed out.

Akano said that more importantly, transmitting sensitive data using the GSM technology which BVAS depended on was not as water-tight as using the satellite technology.

He said that a reconfigured BVAS 2.0 would definitely be capable of identifying and automatically eliminating cases of over-voting from the source polling units using certain Artificial Intelligence technology.

He said that it would thereby save INEC from avoidable embarrassment of having to harmonise their data, as it happened in Osun with three results in one election.

According to him, time is no more for the implementation of this reconfiguration before the Feb. 23 presidential election but suffice to say that the technology to arrest over-voting by BVAS exists today.

"If the F-35 American fighter jet, the most sophisticated fighter jet in the world, can be hacked, BVAS is not absolute," he said.

He, however, described data security privacy as a strong iron steel installed on the window to prevent theft which should be embraced by individuals and organisations.

In his address, the Convener, MrTokunbo Smith, expressed excitement because many government institutions, corporate bodies and professional bodies have joined in celebrating the World Data Privacy Day.

He said that DKIPPI had contributed and was still contributing to the development of Data Privacy and Protection in Nigeria.

Smith said that the desire of the initiative to create awareness on data privacy and educate the public on the importance of data privacy was already yielding positive results.



Wammakko

Politics

2023 polls: Is APC unravelling?

A few weeks to the 2023 general election there is growing fear among observers that current internal wrangling in the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) could tear the party apart and affect its chances in the polls, writes TEMI BAMGBOSE.



President Buhari with Tinubu, APC presidential candidate and others at a campaign rally recently

FORMED in 2013, through a merger between four largest parties, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria People Party (ANPP), along with a breakaway faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), the APC has passed through many phases in the last ten years that had threatened its existence and unity, but has managed to survive.

But despite its waning level of acceptance among Nigerians, because of the abysmal performance of the incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari administration in the last eight years, the party is hoping to produce a successor to Buhari.

In recent months, the dust over the APC's decision to fly a same faith ticket had raged and the dust is yet to settle, with some Nigerians not yet convinced about the party's decision.

It has also been a tough task selling the party presidential candidacy of Bola Ahmed Tinubu to many Nigerians.

Several leaders have defected from the party since he emerged as the candidate.

With the general election drawing closer, it was expected that party leaders would close ranks and speak with one voice and work collectively to return to power.

But recent intrigues in the

party which have seen some party leaders publicly criticising the policies of Muhammadu Buhari leaves much to be desired and casts doubt on the party's unity ahead of the polls.

Perhaps, the first shot was fired by the party's presidential candidate, Bola Tinubu when he said the current fuel scarcity and naira redesign was targeted at him.

Tinubu, a former governor of Lagos State, is believed to have the backing of most APC state governors; however, recent reports had indicated that some powerful individuals close to President Buhari may not be supporting him.

Some days ago, Nasir el-Rufai, Kaduna State governor, while speaking on a television programme, pointedly said that some elements in the presidency were working assiduously to ensure the failure of the APC in this month's presidential election.

He also said the same forces were responsible for the current fuel crisis, adding that this was not the best time for the naira redesign policy.

Some leaders of the party are of the view that Godwin Emezie, the CBN governor was working with certain individuals in the presidency to throw a spanner in Tinubu's presidential bid.

Perhaps, a sign of deeper division in the party emerged on Monday when three state

governments - Kaduna, Kogi and Zamfara - sued the Federal Government at the Supreme Court over the hardship occasioned by the scarcity of the redesigned naira notes.

The three states are in Northern Nigeria where President Buhari hails from.

Pundits say that the current disagreement, especially the manner the naira redesign has been implemented by the CBN, was a clear indication that all was not well with the party.

"I think it is clear that some people have a different agenda or are trying to sabotage the work of others.

"How would you explain a ruling party taking decision that set themselves against the masses few days to the general election? Dayo Tundun, a policy analyst, said.

Tundun wondered why the naira redesign policy was not implemented when Buhari was seeking re-election in 2019, adding that the party may be leading to implosion.

"Are you saying you want to lose? Why didn't Buhari implement this policy in 2019 when he was seeking re-election? There is division among APC leaders about the policy; it may lead to big division which we are seeing already," he said.

Tope Musowo, political analyst, said the internal wrangling would continue now that the implosion has become imminent.

"No matter how pretentious they are about it, it has become clear to everyone that the party is not together and it remains to be seen how they would go to the polls with a divided house and still coast to victory," he said.

Some observers have also said that Buhari's failure may have contributed to the aloofness of many party members, who though are still carrying their tags as members, have made up their minds to vote against the party and its presidential candidate.

They also said that Buhari's waning popularity in the North, where he used to be worshipped by natives, may have also affected the party. "The huge votes that Buhari used to command in the North may no longer be so as many musicians, opinion molders, farmers, among others, are angry with Buhari. His reluctance to go all out with Tinubu on campaign is a tactic to withdraw from the angry mob as he runs the risk of finding how unpopular he has become among the same people that used to adore him," a chieftain of the party told BusinessDay on condition of anonymity.

In what seemed a deeper disaffection in the ruling party, some members had last weekend addressed a press conference in Abuja, to support el-Rufai's allegation that some

powerful persons within the government and the seat of power may be working against Tinubu's electoral victory.

The members under the aegis of Concerned APC stakeholders condemned the lackadaisical attitude of the party leadership, state governors and government appointees, including ministers to Tinubu's campaign in terms of funding.

According to the stakeholders, these top party members and party officials have abandoned Tinubu in their bid to frustrate the APC presidential candidate, even as they have introduced unpopular and anti-people policies just to pitch the people against the governing party and its candidates.

The Convener of the Concerned APC Stakeholders, Dominic Alancha, said: "We want to use this opportunity to align with some of our leaders who had spoken of certain sabotage of this administration, of this President and of this party."

Alancha further said that even when the president directly ordered some cabinet members, including his chief of staff, to accommodate young party members on a visit led by their leader, Ismael Ahmed, in 2021, they have done nothing, eliciting the anger of party faithful, especially the younger members of the party.

BusinessDay.

IMAGES

PLATEAU AT 47 AND FORGIVENESS DAY 2023

The celebration of Plateau State at 47 and the annual Forgiveness Day 2023 took place yesterday at the Rwang Pam Township Stadium, Jos



Governor Simon Bako Lalong (CON) arriving the venue of the ceremony, received by SGS, Prof. Danladi Abok Atu and Chairman, Jos North LGC, Hon. Shehu Bala Usman



Cross section of PIDAN during the march pass



From left are, Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon. Dan Manjang, Speaker, PLHA, Rt. Hon. Yakubu Sanda and the Deputy Governor, Prof. Sonni Gwanle Tyoden



Rev. Dr. James Wuye and Sheikh Imam Ashafa of Inter-Faith Mediation Centre Kaduna



From left are Commissioner, Youth and Sports, Hon. Daniel Dung Dalyop, CoS Government House, Hon. Noel Dongjur, Commissioner of Works, Hon. Victor Lapang and CoS, DG, PCC, Hon. Yakubu Dati



Governor Lalong acknowledging cheers from PIDAN



Cross section of Permanent Secretaries at the ceremony



Primate of the Anglican Communion, Most Rev. Henry Ndukuba and wife, Anglican Bishop of Jos, Rev. Dr. Benjamin Kwashi and the Archbishop of the Catholic Diocese, Rev. Matthew Audu, Igbura

PHOTOS: DANLADI DUK

Politics

'APC will deliver Taraba in governorship election'

Rt. Hon. Mark Bako Useni is Member representing Takum 2 State Constituency at the Taraba State House of Assembly. He was recently declared the House of Representatives candidate for Takum/Ussa/Donga Federal Constituency by the Supreme Court. He spoke with our Correspondent, VICTOR GAI, on the Taraba APC governorship tussle and the chances of the party in the forthcoming elections. EXCERPTS:

HOW can you describe your victory at the Supreme Court?

It is by divine intervention. The forces in favour of that litigation from the trial court were from outside the APC. They wanted a situation where the court would declare that there was no candidate for APC in the Federal Constituency so that some people would get it easy. But I am confident that, now that my mandate has been restored, the people of that constituency deserve a better representation and that can be found in me. By the grace of God, I believe that we will win the election.

Knowing well that you have a strong competition from the PDP and the strong influence of Governor Ishaku under whose constituency you are contesting, how confident are you of victory?

I am very sure because the people are not fools. They know what is good for them. It is very easy for them to make a choice. They have discernment to choose between good representation and bad representation. So I am very confident. Nobody can cow the people when it comes to voting because you are aware that by the grace of God it is going to be one man one vote. The people will exercise their franchise and you will be surprised that they will speak with one voice. The present PDP leadership has not helped people in the south. It has rather divided and impoverished them. It has neglected them. I come from Takum. When you go to Takum, it is a shadow of its old self. The facilities in Takum are facilities that we as local government chairmen had put in place for the people then. The Government Lodge was a local



Useni

government guest house I built as chairman. The present PDP government did not deem it fit to build a new Government Lodge befitting of a Governor's Lodge in Takum. We had an old Governor's Lodge that was destroyed during the crisis. It is still abandoned. The choice is for the people to make for those that would stay with them in times of crisis. You are aware that during the recent crisis in Takum/Ussa area, the state government issued a statement that the people were lying; that people were not being killed. So, I am very confident that the people are going to make a very excellent choice in me.

You are a serving member of the Taraba State House of Assembly and for some time now you have not been visible in the House. Your people must have suffered from lack of representation. How can you convince the

people that you are going to be there for them now that you are aspiring for a bigger position at the National Assembly?

It may interest you to know that in a very dramatic manner, the House of Assembly declared our seats vacant- four of us, in very funny ways that are against the rules of the House and as we speak, the matter is in court. So it won't be right for me to dwell on that matter which is before the Federal High Court.

Considering the latest Supreme Court judgment that nullified your governorship candidate in Taraba, how confident are you of APCs victory in the fourth coming elections?

The judgment is not a palatable one. I am not happy about the judgment but as a law abiding citizen, we are left with no option than to play with the position of the court. As to whether I have



Adamu

confidence in APC delivering Taraba, Tarabans are tired of the leadership we have at the moment. They are yearning for a paradigm shift. The APC has the best opportunity at the moment to win the governorship elections and you will agree with me that the person whose election has been nullified in the person of Senator Emmanuel Bwacha, is somebody that has the quality and the pedigree to provide the kind of leadership that Tarabans are yearning for. He has been a grassroots man. He has served the people in various capacities and there is no doubt that he will deliver. That being the case, I have the confidence that even if fresh election is conducted today, tomorrow or next tomorrow, I have the belief that he will win the election because his coming to APC has brought new light to the party which every person that is right thinking in the party knows.

In a situation where a different candidate emerges in a fresh election, are you going to support such a person? Do you also have confidence in a different person other than Bwacha?

No, I can't vouch for someone I do not know much. I am speaking for the one I know. I am saying this because he was a member of the House of Assembly from Donga and I am from Takum. We are close. He was a member of House of Representatives representing my constituency. I saw his performance. At the moment, he is the senator representing Taraba south. So, I

am afraid that I wouldn't want to vouch for someone that I do not have good knowledge of.

Now it has been confirmed that the candidate you are supporting did not follow due process in emerging as APC governorship candidate. If the candidate whom you have confidence in did not follow due process, how then can he successfully lead a State as governor?

The elections are not conducted by candidates or aspirants. Elections are conducted by the party. It may interest you to know that the party defended the elections up to the Supreme Court. So it was the party that conducted the election. It is the party and not the candidate that conducts elections. So the issue of due process; whether someone followed due process or not has nothing to do with the candidate.

The current perception now in Taraba is that your party is divided. So how confident are you that a divided house can deliver at the forthcoming elections?

Politics is a game of interest; it is a matter of interest. There is no single party devoid of divergent views. As we speak, the PDP has two appeals at the Supreme Court, am I right! So, in politics people would have their interests. For the fact that someone expresses his interest different from his brother's interest, does not mean that the house is completely divided against itself.

"I am very sure because the people are not fools. They know what is good for them. It is very easy for them to make a choice. They have discernment to choose between good representation and bad representation. So I am very confident. Nobody can cow the people when it comes to voting because you are aware that by the grace of God it is going to be one man one vote. The people will exercise their franchise and you will be surprised that they will speak with one voice. The present PDP leadership has not helped people in the south. It has rather divided and impoverished them.

NEWS

Bottle/sachet water inaugurated in Kogi

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

A premium quality water, Jocaloz Bottle/Sachet Water, was over the weekend commissioned in Lokoja, to boost potable water supply in the capital state. Speaking at the commissioning ceremony at the factory plant along Overhead Tank Road Old Poly Quarters, Lokoja, the MD/CEO, Jocaloz Bottle/Sachet Water, Pastor Austin Onyemari, said the initiative was borne out of his passion to solve the challenge of non availability of quality table water in Lokoja and its environ.

Pastor Onyemari said his vision for the establishment of the brand was to address the challenge of getting premium quality and healthy drinking bottle and sachet water at affordable price.

Onyemari said the packaging of the brands were produced in different volumes of 78cl, 50cl bottles and 35cl sachets.

He explained that the various volumes were specifically considered to meet up with different social strata without compromising the water quality.

The MD/CEO urged privileged individuals in the society to establish cottage industries in their communities so as to create employment and boost the economic fortunes of the people and the country at large.

In his short message, the State Pastor of Living Faith Church, Lokoja, Pastor Ben Andrew, who commissioned the factory, said the establishment of Jocaloz Bottle/Sachet Water was an act of God.

According to him, it is a gift from God, and we are handing it over to God so that he can take over everything and make it a success.

Pastor Andrew prayed for prosperity of the business and enjoined the producer to allow God's presence to continue in the venture.

The state Pastor prayed that God would continue to bless and uphold the company. In his remarks, the company's consultant, Dr Oseghale Joe Wealth, said Jocaloz Table Water was established to provide solution to the issue of water shortage and problem of dehydration.

Dr Joe Wealth, who is the CEO of Anold Flight Konsult, explained that the water is of premium quality describing it as having the potential to be the best table water in Nigeria. "Jocaloz water is a very needed product in Nigeria in a time like this. The need for water in Kogi is so enormous because of the nature of the heat in the state.

"We also want to make a difference in the state with



Bello

the kind of standard products and services we are delivering for customers' satisfaction.

Joe Wealth noted that the market demand was already high as the market accepted our product the moment they saw it. This gave us joy as we have enough room to keep expanding to meet the increasing need of our Water.

The consultant urged the residents of Kogi and Nigerians to ensure full patronage, saying Jocaloz Table Water are readily

available at all the major supermarkets and eateries in town.

The Jocaloz Bottle/Sachet Water factory is located along Overhead Tank Road Old Poly Quarters, while the depot is at Road 2 Junction, Old Poly Quarters, Lokoja, Kogi State.

The highlight of the occasion was the official inauguration of the factory and its dedication to God by the state Pastor, Living Faith Church, Lokoja, Pastor Ben Andrew.

Kogi NUJ embarks on Legacy Projects tour

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

KOGI State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), over the weekend, embarked on tour of legacy projects executed by Governor Yahaya Bello.

The projects visited on Saturday included: President Muhammadu Buhari Square, Model Science Secondary, Adankolo and the Overhead Bridge at Ganaja junction, located in Lokoja, the Kogi State capital.

Also the NUJ media tour visited the Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara, as well as the Okene Reference Hospital, headquarters of Okene Local Government Area.

The facility tour was organised by Kogi NUJ as part of the activities marking seven years anniversary of Governor Yahaya Bello in office.

The Kogi State Commissioner for Education, Science and Technology, Wemi Jones while conducting journalists round the

facilities at the new Model Science Secondary School, Adankolo disclosed that the GYB Model Science Secondary Schools were established across the three senatorial districts of the state.

He also hinted that plans are underway to build six more of such schools across the state.

JAMB reveals when 2023 UTME registration will close

THE Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) said all candidates who desire to take the 2023 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) are to requested to create their profiles and proceed to complete their registration as the sale of ePNs closes on Tuesday February 14, 2023.

This was disclosed to Blueprint Monday by JAMB's Head of Public Affairs and Protocol, Dr Fabian Benjamin, in a statement. The statement reads in

FROM JIDAUNA YANUNG Abuja

DIRECTOR General of Industrial Training Fund (ITF, Joseph Ari, has launched the framework for National Apprenticeship and Traineeship System (NATS) to help combat unemployment and reduce poverty in the country.

He said the nation achieved the NATS through a robust trajectory of vision formulation.

Ari spoke at the launch of the framework for the new policy recently in Abuja. The ITF boss recalled that by the middle of last year, the fund, still leveraging new training trends, realized the need to refocus its operations along indices that would boost job and wealth creation.

He said having collaborated and worked with Germany on its dual system, crown Agents of the United Kingdom (UK), Senai of Brazil and GIMI of Israel, which emphasize apprenticeship, it became imperative.

Locally, the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA), the umbrella body of the Organised Private Sector (OPS); and, internationally, the Skills for Prosperity (S4P) of UK became readily available.

State University for commissioning new campus soon

Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri of Adamawa State says the new campus of the Adamawa State University Mubi is

ITF launches NATS framework in Abuja



Ari

"The firming up of partnership with these bodies gave rise to the first skills summit in March, 2022, were a new vision anchored on National Apprenticeship and Traineeship System was unveiled. Since then, a lot of work has been done to strengthen this partnership" Ari said.

The ITF boss said the framework, well

Implemented, has the potential to drastically reduce unemployment.

He added that the new system would also enable youths to earn income while learning, enhance eligibility for financial assistance while on training.

Ari also said it would engage a sizable number of youth since it does not require formal education as a prerequisite.

From GYANG PAM, Yola

soon to be commissioned in Maiha the Local Government

- Fintiri

headquarters.

Addressing party supporters at Guli in Maiha Local Government Area of the state, he equally promised to connect the area to the national grid having been abandoned by previous regimes.

He further assured the people of Maiha that the 37 kilometers Pella - Maiha road which links Maiha - Hong is to be constructed soon.

"The road awarded by successive administrations in the state has suffered abandonment by the contractor despite contractual agreement," he lamented.

But however, the PDP government has since revoked the contract and re-awarded it to what the government says was 'to a competent contractor'.

He equally told an excited crowd that N1.3billion has been released to the new contractors.

During the campaign rally, hundreds of people led by one Nasiru Adamu an APC stalwart defected to the PDP.

Jones described the GYB Model Science Secondary Schools as fully equipped with Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Agricultural Science, Home Economics and Language laboratories for the students.

He said that the prototype 2 of the GYB Model Science Secondary Schools will provide students for the two state universities.

He explained that the idea behind the establishment of GYB Model Science Secondary Schools is for the state to take advantage of its rich natural resources to develop science education.

The commissioner explained that the world is now moving towards science, technology and mathematics, pointing out that the state cannot afford to be left behind.

part, "It would be recalled that the sale of the 2023 UTME commenced on Saturday, 14th January, 2023, and is set to close on Tuesday, 14th of February, 2023.

"The Board has noticed a drop in the number of candidates at registration centres and hope there will not be any late surge as no extension whatsoever will be countenanced."

Dr Fabian said prospective candidates are to note that the UTME calendar is

planned in such a way as to create a window for other examination bodies to also perform their statutory roles.

"It is expedient for the Board to remind all prospective candidates to take advantage of the near empty registration centres to register now rather than wait till the last minute to mount undue pressure on the system," the statement said.

News

Buhari commissions agricultural institute in Lafia

From POLYCARP ISHAYA, Lafia



Buhari

PRESIDENT Muhammadu Buhari recently inaugurated Agricultural Machinery and Equipment Development Institute in Lafia, Nasarawa project, describing NASENI as a reliable institute.

The president who commended NASENI for meeting the January 2023 completion target, said the establishment of the institute and others across the six geopolitical zones was part of the ongoing efforts by his administration to revolutionize the agriculture sector.

It would be recalled that the president had in August and November last year inspected the AMEDI project in Lafia to ascertain the level of work done.

Represented by his Chief of Staff, Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari, he said the institutes spread across the six geopolitical zones in the country would transform the country into agro-allied technology hub, boost food production.

Speaking during the commissioning, the Executive Vice Chairman of NASENI, Professor, Mohammed Sani Haruna, said the commissioning of the AMEDI in Nasarawa was the second in the series of NASENI projects embarked on by the administration of the president.

AMEDI Lafia is the first to be completed among the six equals across the geo political zones of the country", Prof Haruna stated.

The Executive Vice Chairman, said the conceptualization of the model institute was targeted at the use of science

and engineering infrastructure to support the presidential efforts in the attainment of food and nutritional security in Nigeria and for Nigerians.

"The peculiarity of our soil with inherent factors and peculiar topography require the production of made in Nigeria agricultural implements, machinery and equipment that can support responsible and productive agricultural practices in the face of climate change.

"We are conversant with the Sustainable Development Goals and our national expectations to end hunger and create decent cum

inclusive jobs for our youth and women.

According to the NASENI Executive Vice Chairman, the main workshop in the institute shall become a model of SMART factory that will leverage cutting edge technologies to deliver made in Nigeria products and market demand driven services that are suitable for both our farmers and arable lands.

The institute has installed modern equipment for the processing of fruit juices, milk and other dairy products such as tomato processing.

"This institute is equipped with Central Research Laboratory that will support the research activities of the institute along the various value chains of the target product lines of the institute.

2023 census: 1, 057 facilitators, specialised workforce take oath

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

A total of 1,057 Specialised Workforce (SWF), facilitators, trainers and National Population Commission (NPC) officials in Kogi have taken an oath of secrecy in conducting the 2023 Census.

Out of the figure, 724 are Facilitator Trainees, 254 SWFs, 50 trainers, 26 Data Quality Managers, the State Director, the state Training Coordinator and the state Field Coordinator respectively.

Magistrate Abubakar Saiki however, led the

functionaries into the oath taking ceremony held at the auditorium of the Federal University Lokoja (FUL).

Addressing the participants, Prof. Habibat Isa-Jimoh, the Kogi NPC Federal Commissioner, reminded them of the import of oath taking so as to remain secretive and faithful to the cause of census.

Isa-Jimoh urged them to ensure that 'every resident of Kogi is counted irrespective of age and location within the state."

"This is a digital and technology driven census that is so unique and different from what it was in the past. So, you must ensure everyone is

counted and captured.

"The aged great grand fathers and mothers, no matter their frailty, and even a day old child, must be counted and captured.

"As enumerators and officials, you must be sure of the figure you have in a particular location before entering it in the digital machine.

"This is because whatever information entered in the machine can't be altered anymore," he warned.

The federal commissioner warned them against sharp practices during the exercise, more so that they would be monitored by teams of supervisors, who in turn are being monitored by commission's directors and quality assurance officers.

He further said, "Any mistake you make will be corrected and remember, you can't cheat anybody just as you can't be cheated, so be sincere and truthful with your work."

The commissioner admonished residents of Kogi to ensure that they are counted because "if one person is not counted, it means the census is not complete or correct."

"It's our mandate to ensure that everybody is counted in Kogi to qualify the people of the state for any resource/benefit that will come from the centre - Federal Government," Isa-Jimoh said.



Changing the narratives

Too many things are happening in our country at neck breaking speed. Before you finish understanding and appreciating one issue, another just manifests leaving you wondering what to make of some of these issues. From grappling with political issues to insecurity and, now kidnapping for money have all come to be bedmates in our society.

In the early days of independence, coups and counter coups were the vogue. Governments, albeit military ones were the order. At the slightest opportunity, military officers dabbled into politics claiming they had come to sanitise the landscape of the corruption being perpetrated by either politicians or their uniform colleagues. But at the end of it all, the so-called angels who had come to cleanse the Augean stable themselves become ensnared by what they had set out to change. This went on for a very long period of time and led to the stunting of the growth of democracy and the society.

When it was no longer fashionable for soldiers to perpetrate themselves in the political space, they unwillingly gave way to civil rule. Indeed, because they had amassed so much money and, because democracy was such an expensive venture, they transmuted or changed their uniforms for *agbada* and continued the domination of the political space. Bad governance became the lot of the country because the militarization of the political space by ex- soldiers was the order. Governors never respected political ethos and carried on like demigods who had conquered the land. Anyone who stood in their way was crushed using the instrumentality of the state.

With time, and with the gradual co-option of few civilians, things began to change even though they too acted in a similar fashion like their military counterparts. They abused power and never respected the verdicts of the courts whenever they run foul of the law. Since the right thing was not being done by those who held political power, it gave room for the flourishing early in the return to democracy of dissenting groups. These pressure groups

metamorphosed into dangerous and dreaded organisations unleashing terror and horror on the society.

It started with the political sharia of the Obasanjo era and transmuted into the Boko Haram that laid seize on the entire North East region employing the scorch earth policy which rendered the region useless and dangerous. If Obasanjo had acted fast, he would have nipped in the bud this unfortunate malfeasance which was latter to transform into different variants.

Then came kidnapping for money and the destruction in human lives that came with it. People no longer felt safe in their homes or whilst on journeys as they became targets and commodities of trade. Citizens taken hostage were traded for money and where the families could not cough out the needed amount, the kidnapped person was either killed or permanent deformed. In some instances, even when payments are made, the kidnapped persons are still killed. This has made Nigeria

Thousands of Nigerian medical doctors and nurses ply their trade in countries that were considered self sufficient in those fields. As a matter of fact, teachers and other professionals have joined the fray and have caused a serious shortfall in these fields. The country therefore, suffers because of these multifarious ills and unless something drastic and deliberate is done, the danger that looms in the horizon might led us to the path of perdition and chaos.

one of the most dangerous place to be born in and unless something drastic is done to arrest the trend, the country would continue to suffer.

We have not fared better in other spheres of human endeavours as education has been completely neglected. Our schools go on strikes and students spend more times at home than they do in class. This has led to the drastic fall in the standard of our education. This fall in standard has had ripple effects on the quality of graduates our schools churn out. On the other hand brain drain caused by unemployment has led to our young people migrating to other climes to find jobs that are scarcely available.

Thousands of Nigerian medical doctors and nurses ply their trade in countries that were considered self sufficient in those fields. As a matter of fact, teachers and other professionals have joined the fray and have caused a serious shortfall in these fields. The country therefore, suffers because of these multifarious ills and unless something drastic and deliberate is done, the danger that looms in the horizon might led us to the path of perdition and chaos.

What can be done? We must start to retrace our steps and begin to love our country more. Education, infrastructure and human capital development must take centre stage and we must resolve to do right. We must enforce our constitution and not allow bigots to sidestep our development and growth for their selfish ends. When we insist on the right thing being done, we are likely to solve most of the teething problems that often accompany and stunt our growth.

There is a window of opportunity in the next few weeks to correct some of these unfortunate events that have plagued our country. The 2023 elections provide a window for us to elect leaders who can turn things around for us. Those who are patriotic and have the credentials to change our fortunes, not those who will come to line their pockets and those of their cronies. This coming elections would serve as litmus test for Nigerians to make or mar all that they have complained about.



Kwarra

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News

NAHCON allocates seats for 2023 pilgrimage

From ANENE AIKE, Sokoto

THE National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has allocated seats to the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory for the 2023 pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

This was contained in a statement by the Assistant Director of Information and Publications, Mousa Ubandawaki and made available to newsmen on Saturday.

He said the allocation followed the executives ratification of the seats throughout Federal Republic of Nigeria

According to the table of the allocation prepared by the Pilgrims Welfare Boards/agencies/commissions of the states, the FCT, and the Armed Forces, states that got the highest are: Kaduna which received 5,982, followed by Kano, 5,902; Sokoto, 5,505; Niger, 5,165; and Katsina, 4,913.

He also revealed that the lowest seats went to Imo which got 30, Bayelsa, 35 and Anambra, 39 even as the seats were allocated through the Pilgrims Welfare Boards/agencies/commissions of the states, the FCT, including the Armed Forces.

Our correspondent also reports the details of the seat allocation were as follows; Abia 53, Adamawa 2,669, Anambra 39

Bauchi 3,132, Bayelsa 35, Benue 236, Borno 2,735, Cross Rivers 66, Delta 74, Nasarawa 1,567, Niger



Sa'ad

5,165, Ogun 1,139, Ondo 436, Osun 1,054, Oyo 1,441, Yobe 1,968, Ebony 117, Edo 274, Ekiti 197, Enugu 40

FCT 3,520, Gombe 2,301, Imo 30, Jigawa 1,525, Kaduna 5,982, Kano 5,902, Katsina 4,913, Armed Forces 548, Kebbi 4,871, Kwara 3,219, Lagos 3,576, Plateau 1,984, Rivers 50, Sokoto 5,504, Taraba 1,590, Zamfara 3,083

According to the Board, the seats for Kogi State will be released after the conclusion of the ongoing review of its activities while allocation of Akwa Ibom State was suspended due to non renewal of its

operating license.

All states were expected to remit payment of 50% of the 2022 seat allocation to the Commission before the February 10 deadline.

Also the inability of any state to comply with the deadline date will lead to a reduction in allocation to such a state, no going back.

2 killed as LP Reps candidate escapes

From John FWAH, Kaduna

UNKNOWN gunmen Friday night stormed the residence of the Suleiman Tambaya, House of Representatives candidate for Labour Party,

A Professor of Zoology/Avian Parasitology, Adang Kombe Lucas has called on government at all levels to intensify efforts in promoting afforestation and discouraging deforestation to prevent erosion, pollution and other environmental degradation.

Professor Lucas who is a lecturer with the Federal University Lokoja, Biology Department made the call at Adankolo Campus of the institution while presenting the 9th Inaugural Lecture with the topic "Birds : Their Roles in Sustaining the Environment" to the university community.

The university don who advocated for the planting of more useful trees to safeguard the environment, lamented that environmental degradation, habitat destruction and deforestation have been indirect threats to the existence of birds and other animals.

He expressed worries that forest which offers life support systems in the country is gradually going into extinction, noting that the iroko, ebony, mahogany, obeche trees used as timber for paper, furniture and building industries have been massively exploited without replacement.

"The population, community, environment itself suffers when natural resources are depleted without replacement. "A sustained environment is likely to create jobs and occupation for the yearning youth population, such as farming, logging, timber exploitation, forest resources marketing among others.

"Also, a sustained

Varsity don suggests tree planting against disaster



Bello

environment provides raw materials for industries like the paper and pharmaceutical industries in which youths can be gainfully employed.

"Some of the trees that birds pollinate or spread their seeds are of medicinal value, provide wood/timber for furniture and building construction. They provide fruits/food for man and wildlife, income generation for rural dwellers, poverty reduction, employment and sustainable livelihood," he said.

Speaking on the significance of birds to the environment,

the university don said birds are considered as vital organs for forest biodiversity, stressing that any ecosystem or environment without the presence of birds can be regarded as "ecological death".

In his closing remark, the Vice Chancellor of the institution, Professor Olayemi Akinwumi, described the 9th Inaugural Lecture as one of the best in the history of the institution.orted to have sources of livelihood," the commissioner said.

NUT advocates support for worker friendly candidates

THE Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) has called on its members nationwide to vote for candidates in the forthcoming general election, who are worker friendly.

The National President,

NUT, Comrade Titus Amba made the call at the Union's Annual Solemn Assembly held on Monday in Abuja.

According to Amba, teachers train all the professionals in different

fields, but it is surprising that they are the least paid and most relegated in the country.

"I, therefore, urge all our members to vote wisely but should not vote for any candidate that is not worker friendly, no matter the inducement, persuasion or any consideration" he said.

"Remember that your voter cards are your voices and power. Therefore, we cannot afford to be mute in this critical and decisive moment of our nation's history.

"In most of the developed countries even the developing ones; they place more priority on the welfare of teachers," he said.

Amba said when one neglected the welfare of teachers certainly one would not get the needed result.

He said that the leadership of the union had increasingly engaged the states government on the

issues of N30,000 Minimum Wage and Consequential Adjustments.

Amba said that the Union had also filed trade dispute with the Registrar of Trade Unions against some non-cooperative states governments.

He reaffirmed the determination of his administration to take the Union to greater heights, through the immense, solid and numerous achievements of his predecessors.

Earlier in his sermon Imam Muhammad Bin 'Uthman urged government at all levels to ensure adequate security for the nation towards better learning condition.

Bin 'Uthman said for any nation to be educationally developed, there must be physical and spiritual security, saying that insecurity is a big challenge to national development.

He added that other

factors necessary for national development included food security, job opportunity, power supply and quality healthcare system.

Also speaking, Rev. Fr. Nduka Uzo, advised that Nigerians should learn to live together in love and harmony irrespective of their differences.

Uzo encouraged teachers to always come to God in prayers, praises and thanksgiving, saying instead of complaining, they should use the time to ask God for provisions.

He said that being a teacher was a vocation, so they should not give up in the struggle.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that the NUT solemn assembly was to commit the leaders, teachers, their welfare and action plans to the hands of God towards an all-round success for the good of the profession and the nation. (NAN)



Foreign Commentary

Balloon saga deflates efforts for US-China relations

YOU can track the trajectory of China's response to its balloon just as the Pentagon was tracking the trajectory of a high-altitude piece of equipment destined to be blown out of the sky. STEPHEN MCDONELL writes.

WE'RE investigating; we regret that it is our weather balloon blown off course; we think US politicians and media are hyping this up; everyone stay calm; the US attack on this airship is a serious violation of international practice.

With Antony Blinken - the US's top diplomat - scheduled to visit China this week, Beijing had initially tried to reassure Washington this had all been an accident.

But once it became clear that the secretary of state wasn't coming, and that the balloon was not coming back either, the gloves were off.

It is a long way from where the Chinese government wanted things to be at this moment.

The US Secretary of State was supposed to be here building bridges or at least trying to stop those that still exist from being destroyed.

Make no mistake. Chinese President Xi Jinping had great hopes for this visit and was, reportedly, even going to meet Mr Blinken himself.

So what balloon-gathered intelligence could be so good that it was worth scuppering this process?

The short answer is none. Which is why many analysts think that, even if it was to some extent spying, the deployment of this balloon, in this way, at this time, had to have been an error on the Chinese side.

And, if that is the case, somebody is getting hauled over the coals for it, especially given that there are now two of these high-altitude balloons in play, with another floating above Latin America. There has been no word whether it too is supposed to have been blown wildly off course, given its "limited self-steering capability".

Internationally, many seem to imagine that China's Communist Party is an all-knowing, locked in, organ of power - something along the lines of a giant, efficient, supercomputer with Xi Jinping toggling the controls.

It is a massive, sprawling organisation, that is certain. However, it is also made up of departments and power blocks competing for influence, at times hoarding information and even deliberately not foreshadowing their actions lest a rival gain some unwanted advantage.

When a clearly visible, equipment-carrying balloon started floating close to US nuclear missile siloes, the assumption from some had been not only that it was spying but that it must have been sent as a message to the Biden administration.

But when you consider the damage it has done in terms of derailing a visit that the Chinese government, right up to the very top, wanted to happen, it is hard to see how this analysis stacks up.

We know that the Blinken trip was important here because we saw how Beijing tried to save it using quite conciliatory language.

"The Chinese side regrets the unintended entry of the airship into US airspace due to force majeure," a foreign ministry spokesperson was quoted as saying.

The extent to which it was deployed to study the weather or spy doesn't really matter in terms of understanding how crushing this incident has been for those on both sides who have been looking for ways to ease US-China tensions.

An enormous breakthrough was



Presidents Xi Jinping and Joe Biden smiled for the cameras in an occasion recently.

not expected from Mr Blinken's meetings in Beijing. The meetings themselves were to be the breakthrough.

They would have spoken about moves towards a set of "guard rails", means of communication and lines not to cross in an attempt to prevent a drift towards armed conflict.

President Xi also wanted it because he's looking for some big signs back at home that his administration knows what it is doing when it comes to steering China into the future.

A sudden and embarrassing retreat from the zero-Covid approach came just months after China's leader had declared at the Party Congress that there would be no swerving from it.

Then the speed of the about-face led to overcrowded hospital emergency rooms, medicine shortages and an unknown Covid death toll.

The government now needs to put all this behind it and encourage an image of a China which is turning around economically and opening up again.

A high-level US visit would have been quite useful in this regard.

Examine the protestations from the major superpowers this week.

Washington has said this was a "clear violation of US sovereignty" but we all know that it has plenty of its own very sophisticated means of spying on China.

Beijing has condemned this US "attack on a civilian unmanned airship" but we all know that if a US surveillance balloon flew into Chinese airspace the People's Liberation Army would have it down in no time.

In a way, this means that the outrage from both sides contains a fair bit of theatre.

The upside is that, now the balloon is no more, they will be able to move on from it and reschedule a Beijing visit by Mr Blinken at a time when people are asking each other, "hey do you remember that whole balloon thing?".

The Department of Defence confirmed its fighter jets brought down the balloon over US territorial waters.

China's foreign ministry later expressed "strong dissatisfaction and protest against the US's use of force to attack civilian unmanned aircraft".

Footage on US TV networks showed the balloon falling to the sea after a small explosion.

An F-22 jet fighter engaged the high-altitude balloon with one missile - an AIM-9X Sidewinder - and it went down about six nautical miles off the US coast at 14:39 EST (19:39 GMT), a defence official told reporters.

Defence officials told US media the debris landed in 47ft (14m) of water - shallower than they had expected - near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

The military is now trying to recover debris which is spread over seven miles (11km). Two naval ships, including one with a heavy crane for recovery, are in the area.

In a Pentagon statement a senior US defence official said that "while we took all necessary steps to protect against the PRC [China] surveillance balloon's collection of sensitive information, the surveillance balloon's overflight of US territory was of intelligence value to us.

"We were able to study and scrutinise the balloon and its equipment, which has been valuable," the official added.

US President Joe Biden had been under pressure to shoot it down since defence officials first announced they were tracking it on Thursday.

Afterwards, Mr Biden said: "They successfully took it down, and I want to compliment our aviators who did it."

In a statement a few hours later, the Chinese foreign ministry said: "The Chinese side has repeatedly informed the US side after verification that the airship is for civilian use and entered the US due

to force majeure - it was completely an accident."

The discovery of the balloon set off a diplomatic crisis, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken immediately calling off this weekend's trip to China over the "irresponsible act".

The Chinese authorities have denied it is a spying aircraft, and instead said it was a weather ship blown astray.

Reacting to the incident, Taiwan's foreign ministry said in a statement: "The Chinese Communist Party government's actions that violate international law and violate the airspace and sovereignty of other countries should not be tolerated in a civilised international community."

China considers self-ruled Taiwan a breakaway province that will eventually be under Beijing's control. President Xi Jinping has not ruled out the possible use of force to achieve this.

But Taiwan sees itself as independent, with its own constitution and democratically-elected leaders.

President Biden first approved the plan to down the balloon on Wednesday, but the Pentagon said it had decided to wait until the object was over water so as not to put people on the ground at undue risk.

Groundwork for the operation was laid when the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) briefly paused all civilian flights at three airports around the South Carolina coast on Saturday afternoon because of a "national security effort".

The coast guard also advised mariners to leave the area due to military operations "that present a significant hazard".

An eyewitness on the coast, Hayley Walsh, told BBC News she saw three fighter jets circling before the missile was fired, then "we heard a huge boom, the house shook".

One senior military official told

CNN the recovery of debris should be "fairly easy" and could take "relatively short time". The official added that "capable Navy divers" could be deployed to assist in the operation.

Defence officials also revealed on Saturday the balloon had first entered US airspace on 28 January near the Aleutian Islands, before moving to Canadian airspace three days later, and re-entering the US on 31 January. The object was spotted in the US state of Montana, which is home to a number of sensitive nuclear missile sites.

Relations between China and the US have been exacerbated by the incident, with the Pentagon calling it an "unacceptable violation" of US sovereignty.

Mr Blinken - America's top diplomat - told Beijing it was "an irresponsible act" ahead of his now-cancelled trip on 5-6 February - it would have been the first such high level US-China meeting there in years.

But China sought to play down the cancellation of his visit, saying in a statement on Saturday that neither side had formally announced a plan for a trip.

China's foreign ministry said Beijing "would not accept any groundless conjecture or hype" and accused "some politicians and media in the United States" of using the incident "as a pretext to attack and smear China."

On Friday, the Pentagon said a second Chinese spy balloon had been spotted - this time over Latin America with reported sightings over Costa Rica and Venezuela.

Colombia's Air Force says an identified object - believed to be a balloon - was detected on 3 February in the country's airspace at above 55,000ft.

It says it followed the object until it left the airspace, adding that it did not represent a threat to national security.

China has not yet commented publicly on the reported second balloon.

Source: BBC news

Foreign News

South Sudan: Pope makes final appeal for peace

POPE Francis has ended a trip to South Sudan with an impassioned plea for peace and forgiveness in the war-torn country.

Francis made the appeal on Sunday as he presided over an open-air Mass attended by 100,000 people on the grounds of a Mausoleum for South Sudan's liberation hero John Garang in the capital Juba.

He urged worshippers – including the country's president and his opponents – to reject the "blind fury of violence".

Francis also called for an end to tribalism, financial wrongdoing and the alleged corruption at the root of many of the country's problems, while advising attendees to build "good human relationships as a way of curbing the corruption of evil, the disease of division, the filth of fraudulent business dealings and the plague of injustice".

Many in the crowd sang, drummed and ululated as Francis entered the grounds. His homily was repeatedly interrupted by loud cheers.

"Dear brothers and sisters, I return to Rome with you even closer to my heart," he said. "Never lose hope. And lose no opportunity to build peace. May hope and peace dwell



Pope

among you. May hope and peace dwell in South Sudan." The visit marked the first time in Christian history that leaders of the Catholic, Anglican and Reformed traditions conducted a joint foreign trip, with the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, leader of the global Anglican Communion, and Iain Greenshields, moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, joining Francis for the "pilgrimage of peace". The tour of the continent also included a stop in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, home to Africa's largest Roman Catholic community, where Francis condemned what he called the foreign plundering of Africa.

Huge quake toppled buildings in Turkey, Syria

A powerful earthquake has struck in South-Eastern Turkey, near the Syrian border, killing more than 500 people as they slept and trapping many others.

The US Geological Survey said the 7.8 magnitude tremor struck at 04:17 local time (01:17 GMT) at a depth of 17.9km (11 miles) near the city of Gaziantep.

Turkish Vice-President Fuat Oktay said the death toll in Turkey had now risen to 284 people.

In Syria, more than 230 people were killed, state media reported.

The Syrian health ministry said people had died in the provinces of Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Tartus.

There are fears the number

of deaths will rise sharply in the coming hours.

Many buildings have collapsed and rescue teams have been deployed to search for survivors under huge piles of rubble.

The epicentre of the quake was in the Pazarcik district of Kahramanmaraş province. Turkish Interior Minister Suleymon Soylu said 10 cities

UKRAINE'S outgoing Defence Minister has said the country is anticipating a new Russian offensive later this month.

At a news conference, Oleksiy Reznikov said not all Western weaponry will have arrived by then, but Ukraine had enough reserves to hold off Russian forces.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said troops were fighting fiercely in Bakhmut, Vuhledar and Lyman.

Mr Reznikov's comments came hours before it was announced that he was to be replaced as defence minister.

Military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov will take his place, according to a Ukrainian politician from Mr Zelensky's party.

The shake-up comes amid a series of corruption scandals that has plagued the defence ministry.

Mr Reznikov has denied media reports that some defence officials are suspected of embezzling public funds for the procurement of food for the army.

Ukrainian lawmaker David Arakhamia announced the reshuffle on Sunday, saying that "war dictates personnel policies". Mr Reznikov, a familiar face in Ukraine's efforts to secure Western weapons, will now become minister for strategic industries.

President Zelensky has already fired a number of senior officials as part of a broad anti-

were affected: Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Osmaniye, Adiyaman, Malatya, Sanliurfa, Adana, Diyarbakir and Kilis.

In Gaziantep, at least 80 people were killed, officials said, while 70 died in Kahramanmaraş.

In Malatya province, north-east of Gaziantep, at least 47 people were killed. In Sanliurfa, to the east, there were 18 deaths. Other deaths were reported in various places including Diyarbakir and Osmaniye.

At least 2,323 people were injured in Turkey and 639 in Syria.

Report has it that a shopping mall in the city collapsed.

The tremor was also felt in Lebanon and Cyprus.

"I was writing something and just all of a sudden the entire building started shaking and yes I didn't really know what to feel," Mohamad El Chamaa, a student in the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

"I was right next to the window so I was just scared that they might shatter. It went on for four-five minutes and it was pretty horrific. It was mind-blowing," he said.

Source has it that there was about 45 seconds of shaking in the house he was staying in.

Turkish seismologists estimated the strength of the quake to be 7.4 magnitude. They said that a second tremor hit the region just minutes later.

Turkey lies in one of the world's most active earthquake zones.

In 1999, more than 17,000 people were killed after a powerful tremor rocked the north-west of the country.

Ukraine braced for renewed Russian offensive attacks



Ukraine's defence minister says training on new Western weapons will start as early as Monday

corruption drive across his government.

At an earlier news conference, Mr Reznikov said Russia did not have all of its resources ready to launch an offensive, but may do so anyway as a symbolic gesture, given the one-year anniversary of Moscow's full-scale invasion on 24 February.

He said Russia was expected to prioritise taking the whole of the eastern Donbas as well as launching offensives in the south of Ukraine.

The defence minister also confirmed that troops would start training on German-made Leopard tanks from Monday.

Mr Reznikov said Ukraine had secured new long-range missiles with a range of 90-mile (150km), but they will not be used against Russian territory - only against Russian units in occupied areas of Ukraine.

"I am sure that we will win this war," said Mr Reznikov, but he added that without the delivery of Western fighter jets, "it will cost us more lives".

Despite the flow of Western weapons to Ukraine, Russia has made gains around the Bakhmut area in recent days, as Russia's army throws more and more soldiers into combat.

Russia's paramilitary mercenary group Wagner have

led much of the fighting in the area.

Its head, Yevgeny Prigozhin, said there are fierce battles for every street in some areas of the city, and Ukraine's armed forces were "fighting to the last".

Russian forces have been attempting to seize control of Bakhmut for months - making it the longest battle since Russia invaded Ukraine almost a year ago.

Taking the area is important to Russia as part of its aim to control the whole of the Donbas region.

It would also signify a turnaround in Russia's fortunes after it lost ground in Ukraine during recent months.

Speaking during his nightly address, President Zelensky said: "Things are very difficult in Donetsk region - fierce battles." But, he added, "we have no alternative to defending ourselves and winning".

The UK's Ministry of Defence said Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut are getting increasingly isolated as the Russians continue to make small advances in its attempt to encircle the town.

It added that the two main roads into Bakhmut were likely being threatened by direct fire.

Millions vote in Ethiopia referendum

MILLIONS of voters in Southern Ethiopia are casting their ballots on Monday in a referendum to establish a new regional state.

This is the third such referendum - all in the country's south - held in the past four years.

Previous votes saw the formation of Sidama and South-Western Ethiopia regions.

More than three million people are registered to vote in this election - which will be held in six sub-regional administrative units (zones) and five districts that have been part of the Southern Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and People's (SNNP) region.

The new region is to be called Southern Ethiopia region, if it gets a yes vote.



People search through rubble in Diyarbakir, Turkey



This picture is a result of previous referendum in 2019

Feature

Queuing up: New way of life for Nigerians

Waking up as early as 4, 5 am has become a way of life for most Nigerians as they Indian-file to banks for unavailable cash, to filling stations for hard-to-get fuel and to designated INEC collection centres for PVCs they may never return home with. The joke these days is what are you queuing for? Is it money, gasoline or voter's card? Michael Jimoh, writes

THEWILL considers what may likely happen with the mother of all queues in late February and mid-March when millions of voters will throng polling stations to elect the same people responsible for the ubiquitous serpentine formations choking the very life out of them. Michael Jimoh reports.

Around 7.30am last Friday, two journalists left their office in GRA Ikeja to a branch of their bank on Mobolaji Bank Anthony Way. From their point of departure on Remi Fani-Kayode Street, a steady pace would get them to the bank in less than half an hour. They did. By the time they got to the bank premises, there were already people there, none of them smiling.

A middle-aged woman sat on a plastic chair by the bank's entrance, her right hand supporting her right cheek. Others stood, some with hands akimbo, some with hands folded across their chest and nearly all of them looking quite apprehensive. A soldier arrived on a motorbike, said hello and waited with others outside the bank. Another followed not long after. It was not hard to see why.

The previous day Thursday February 1, governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria Godwin Emefiele had directed banks to start paying the new naira notes over the counter and not only via their Automated Teller Machines. Scarcer than the dollar in war time soon after the deadline for the currency swap ended on January 31 and even after the February 10 extension, Nigerians hoped to be paid the redesigned new naira notes as instructed by Emefiele. It never got to be.

At about two minutes to 8 when banks open their revolving doors, those outside were already restive. For many of them, it was like eternity, as if the two minutes will drag on forever. At last, a bank security guard green-lighted the waiting customers at 8 on the dot, eliciting some sigh of relief from them. Since the governor of the apex bank in the country had given the command, he expected the new notes would readily be available in many banks and paid OTC to long-suffering customers.

The anxious customers soon filed into the banking hall, the soothing breeze of the air-conditioners welcoming them. "I hope there is money to withdraw," everyone seemed to ask at the same time. "No," some of the tellers, mostly female, replied. "We are still waiting for the new notes to be supplied," they went on, thus dispelling any hope that the early arrivals would be lucky enough to be paid in the redesigned naira notes.

Never hope for too much in life, so the saying goes, so you won't be too disappointed if what you hope for never comes. For the dozen-plus customers that Friday morning, it was exactly so. No new notes, period! But there was some respite however. Two of the tellers let on they have old notes, in mostly hundred and fifty naira notes, many of them torn, dirty and unsightly. "I have only three thousand naira to give each of you," one said with Delphic finality. She then passed out withdrawal slips to those who wanted to have something to show for time wasted. Some did not and stormed off.

To say that much of the scenario described above was replicated in many banks across the country that weekend is an understatement. Customers of a branch of another bank on the same Mobolaji Bank Anthony Way experienced about the same thing as the journalists in the first branch they went to.

When THEWILL got there shortly after



Buhari

8, there were two long queues starting from the ATM on both sides of the bank, the kind of snakelike lines you find on crucial election days early in the morning. Though the cashiers claimed they had no money – old or new – to dispense OTC, the ATM was actually dispensing some, which accounted for the interminable queues.

"I have been here since 6am," a young woman with horse teeth and grandma spectacles warned, eyeing a chap who was begging the guy in front of her to help him withdraw, "and I will not allow any person to do any mago, mago here."

Upon hearing that, others in the queue turned their baleful glare on the chap who soon disappeared from sight.

After dispensing N10,000 in the new 1000 denominations for about half an hour, the machine stopped. It had run out of cash.

Inside the hall, the story was the same: no new notes, no old notes.

"The ATM has run out of cash," someone told a female teller. Yes, she knows. "We are doing something about it."

Knowing the banker's predilection for double speak, the chap wanted to know if the bank was going to input cash into the ATM right away so he can at least wait.

"We are waiting for the money to be supplied to us," she finally admitted.

When the chap left the banking premises minutes later, both queues were growing ever longer and noisier, many of them waiting and hoping for cash they were not sure to collect.

With Nigeria on the cusp of general elections later this month and mid-March, many adult voters are yet to receive their PVCs thus necessitating the long queues at designated INEC collection centres around the country. Though by far shorter than queues in banks and other money-paying outlets, Nigerians are also having a hard time collecting their PVCs, almost as difficult in accessing their monies in banks.

Frustrated to no end, some have adopted some ruses thus lending credence to the claim that Nigerians are quite resourceful. One such ploy which has since gone viral shows how a pregnant woman finally got hers after trying and failing for nearly a week.

Realising that pregnant women standing in queues were shown some deference by INEC officials, the unnamed woman made herself heavy – not with what you'll expect but with bales and bales of clothing, a sizeable aluminum pan for that generous girth to simulate a far advanced woman with child, all of that concealed and made real by at least two leggings.

Needless to say that her ruse paid off. By the time we see her in her living room, she was deftly removing the props one after another and brandishing her PVC with a sense of relief that she finally got her way. "They gave me my PVC as a pregnant woman," she says smilingly to a man in the background, continuing that "if no be dat one, e for reach years before I get am."

Though she might be exaggerating the time it would take for anyone to receive his/ her PVC, there is certainly some truth in her declaration. It is taking pretty long for most eligible voters to access their PVCs now, especially with the elections just around the corner.

... and for petrol Which Queue Are You Joining Today – For Money, Petrol or PVC?

Nigeria is in a bind right now and it is not funny. Money is in short supply because of the currency swap of old naira notes for new ones. Petrol, the fuel that propels the wheel of the economy, is scarcer to find and, when available, you have to pay thrice the price it was for a litre months ago.

For the first time in their lives, Nigerians rich and poor are confronted with a situation they have never faced before since independence in 1960. The last time something close to this happened was in 1984 when most Nigerians had to fall in line for what became known as Essential Commodities – Essenco for short. Muhammadu Buhari, the incumbent president, was head of state at the time, having ousted the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari on December 31, 1983.

Uncertain of what may happen with the new military government, shop owners and shady distributors started hoarding commodities like rice, beans, sugar, groundnut oil, cement and much else. The new military regime wasted

no time in forcing open such shops across the country, thus allowing Nigerians to queue up and make purchases of the essential commodities they lacked.

In the intervening years, there have been queues for mostly petroleum products through the military dictatorships of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha to the civilian regimes of Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan. But never in the history of Nigeria has there been serpentine lines of citizens waiting to withdraw cash, buy petrol and access their PVCs all at once.

Commenting on the rather strange phenomenon in a publication by BusinessDay of January 29 headlined "Nigeria: A country of queues," the duo of Iniobong Iwok and Nosa Igbinador states from the get-go that "in many cities across Nigeria today, the popular refrain is: "Which queue are you joining today- for fuel, PVC or new naira notes?" This has become necessary as a result of the important role the three items play in the scale of needs of Nigerians and in the economy of the country. The above-listed items have been made scarce, in the estimation of Nigerians, by dark powers that hold the country hostage.

"From collection of the permanent voter's card (PVC) to qualify for voting, to purchasing of petrol for productivity in a country that is a member of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) but has perennial fuel scarcity, and to collection of new naira notes, it has been lamentation all the way."

Referencing a study by Peter M. Lewis of the Warren Weinstein Chair of African Studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), the lamentation is as a result of "state failure and the attendant dysfunction of state institutions." Tracing Nigeria's crisis of governance to the ruling elite and public institutions that never work, Lewis goes on to say that they "have not provided essential collective goods, such as physical infrastructure, the rule of law, or legitimate symbols of state authority and political community."

Added to that is their "inability to meet their responsibility to Nigerians," which, "have over time resulted in unending and unyielding lines of Nigerians seeking an entrée to services that state authorities make extremely difficult to access."

Continuing in their report, Iniobong and Igbinador insist that other countries have had a seamless currency change without the obstacles now confronting Nigerians. They cited the example of the UK where the Bank of England "has been gradually replacing its paper notes with polymer ones over a number of years, and in March 2022, the bank issued its six-month reminder to consumers and businesses about the withdrawal of legal tender status (or WOLTS) of the paper £20 and the paper £50 banknotes on 30 September 2022."

On the other hand, the journalists claim, CBN "gave just over a month for citizens to exchange their old notes for new ones."

This is pure fallacy because the currency swap by the CBN was announced October 26, 2022 till January 31, making it a clear 95 days. Despite this oversight on the part of the journalist, they seem to have struck a chord about the systemic failure of state institutions when they quoted another study conducted by Obasesam Okoi and MaryAnne Iwara. In their

findings two years ago published in the Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, they submit that at the core of Nigeria's systemic failure "is the crisis of governance, which manifests in the declining capacity of the state to cope with a range of internal political and social upheavals. There is an expectation for political leaders to recognize systemic risks such as terrorist attacks, herder-farmer conflict, and police brutality and put in place the necessary infrastructure to gather relevant data for problem solving. But the insufficiency of political savvy required to navigate the challenges that Nigeria faces has unleashed unrest across the nation and exacerbated existing tensions."

To be sure, fuel shortages have become almost routine to Nigerians as Danfo buses ply Lagos roads. Last May, for instance, in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, residents were subjected to petrol scarcity that a journalist with Premium Times Mary Izuaka wrote about the consequent hardship it wrought on residents in Abuja.

"As fuel queues resurfaced across parts of the capital city on Friday," Izuaka wrote, "many Nigerians are worried that they may have entered yet another season of suffering and lamentations."

The journalist could have been speaking about what Nigerians are going through now. Even those she interviewed could have been speaking for motorists queuing up from sunup to sundown at filling stations across the country in the last couple of weeks.

One of them, a civil servant called Joseph, told Izuaka last May that "from what I'm seeing, I don't think this is panic buying, I think there's no fuel and whatever the reason might be I don't know but the government needs to save us this time around because we don't want to experience the suffering we had some months ago. I drove to town and the only fuel station that I saw selling was Total opposite NNPC Tower. There was too much queue there, that's why I had to come down to this airport road."

Already, there have been tragic and some near comic fallouts from the spontaneous queues in search of money, petrol and PVCs by Nigerians. Having tried and failed to withdraw money from his bank, a male adult in one of the banks in Lagos decided that the best way to get the bank staffers' attention was a butt-baring act. In a similar solo protest, a woman decided to go in the buff, leaving only her bra and shorts.

While those solo acts can elicit a hearty guffaw, the same cannot be said of the man who collapsed and died in a bank queue in Port Harcourt recently. At an ATM machine in Benin City last week, students of the University of Benin had a run-in with soldiers. Were it not for the prompt intervention of the authorities, confrontations between military men and students can only be too predictable.

As it stands, Nigerians are not likely to end the queue culture anytime soon. Of course, millions of Nigerians of voting age will troop to the polls later this month and in mid-March. And therein lies the irony: the long-suffering populace now queuing for cash, petrol and PVCs will form the mother of all queues with the odd choice of voting for the same politicians who got them into the trouble they are now confronted with.

THEWILL



Living

Ways to overcome loneliness and feel happy

Loneliness can be due to so many different factors, and can affect both your emotional and physical health long-term. If you want to know what to do when you feel lonely, consider these tips:

Acknowledge Your Feelings of Loneliness

A first step to overcoming loneliness is realizing how you feel and the impact it's having on your life. Try talking to a counselor or therapist. They can help you work through the factors that may be contributing to it, suggest additional steps to combat loneliness, alternative therapies, and help you build coping skills that work for you.

Talk to friends and family. Let them know you're struggling with loneliness. If you've suffered the loss of a relationship, a loved one, lost a job, moved to a new place, are facing other issues that have isolated you, let them know how they might be able to help you feel less lonely.

Know When to Engage or Disengage From the Online World

The online world can be a double-edged sword, especially when it comes to loneliness and social isolation. Log on or log off—which is healthier? It all depends.

The online world offers non-threatening and convenient ways to connect with others that can help if you're trying to overcome loneliness. Things like multi-player gaming, chat and message sites, even online dating sites can offer ways to interact and engage with others that's satisfying for some people. There are also online apps designed to help you deal with issues like loneliness and social isolation.

What about social media? Is it good for you when you're dealing with loneliness? For some people, the online world may contribute to even greater feelings of loneliness and isolation. Social media, for example, can portray people who seem to be living exciting, happy-go-lucky lives with hundreds of good friends at their side. Reality is that this is generally not reality. Social media can make some people feel inadequate, left out, and feeling lonely. Bottom line, if being online seems more isolating than connected, it may be a sign you need to log off.

Find a Volunteer Opportunity as a Way to Feel Less Lonely

Volunteer opportunities are plentiful. Contributing your time and energy, working alongside others for a good cause, can effectively help you in fighting loneliness. Volunteer activities



are shown to ease stress, reduce feelings of depression, can help you make friends, and connect with others, and overall make you a happier person.² A sense of happiness, fulfillment, and connection to others is yet another way to stop feeling lonely.

Join a Group or Club to Overcome Loneliness With In-Person Connections

Depending on where you live, you may have access to various types of groups and club activities often founded on common interests and hobbies. You can find many of these types of groups online or through community resources.

Meetup is an online platform through which you can find a group or create your own based on a particular interest. Groups meet in person, locally. There are Meetup groups for all types of interests, including food, travel, lifestyle, entertainment, sports, recreation, culture, and much more. Meetup groups are available throughout the country and can give you things to do when you feel lonely. It's a great way to make friends and get together with likeminded people on a regular basis.

Practice Self-Care

Besides working to connect with others, don't overlook the potential power of exercise, healthy food, proper sleep, sunshine, and even meditation for fighting loneliness.

Exercise has been shown to trigger endorphins in the brain.³ These are sometimes called the "happy hormones" due to their power to elevate mood and make you simply feel better.

Sunshine can do much the same thing as exercise.⁴ It also triggers good hormones,

including endorphins and serotonin, which have a number of positive downstream benefits. Just make sure you follow safety guidelines when getting out in the sunshine.

A healthy diet can affect your brain health, too. A daily diet of sugar, preservatives, and highly processed food can have negative impacts on your physical and emotional health.⁵ Focus on eating whole foods for a while and see if this can help in your strategy to overcome loneliness.

Sleep quality is closely tied to emotional health. Loss of sleep or poor sleep habits can aggravate feelings of loneliness and isolation, and vice versa.⁶ If you're fighting loneliness, try practicing better sleep habits. Limit sugar and caffeine before bed, turn off digital devices for some relaxation time, and make

sure your bedroom is quiet and dark.

Loneliness affects millions of people. There are many things

you can do when trying to overcome it. The key is realizing how you feel and finding the best strategy for you.



THE EYE'S WORLD

With **Henrietta Gonzuk**

Health

By **SAKSHI GROVER**

Amazing benefits of sugarcane juice for you

ON a hot summer day, sugarcane juice is undoubtedly one of the best ways to quench your thirst and to beat the summer heat. However, there is much more to this tasty tropical fruit than just its yummy taste. Sugarcane is loaded with carbohydrates, protein, vitamins (A, B-complex and C) and also contains good amounts of minerals like phosphorus, calcium, potassium, zinc and iron.

Following are advantages of sugarcane juice or benefits that you can derive by adding this juice to your diet.

1. Gives an instant boost of energy

Sugarcane is ideal for getting an instant punch of energy if you are low or if lethargy has surrounded you.

Prevents ageing

If you have been battling with skin conditions such as premature wrinkles, you may get sugarcane juice to the rescue. The presence of antioxidants, phenolic acid and flavonoids help in moisturising the skin and making it soft and glowing from inside, which also helps in reducing the wrinkles.

Prevents bad breath and tooth decay

Mouth troubles like bad breath can be a real turnoff for. Also, mineral deficiency and bad dental hygiene may cause tooth decays too.

Helpful in pregnancy

The wide variety of nutrients are great for getting the ovulation in place and thus helpful in facilitating the conception too. Presence of folic acid and vitamin B9 has also been proven to reduce the chances of congenital neural disabilities such as [spina bifida](#) in babies.

Helps in digestion

If you have been battling with digestion issues such as constipation for some time now, sugarcane juice may prove to be helpful and help you overcome your woes.

Beneficial for the bones and teeth

Being one of the richest sources of calcium, sugarcane juice is one of the best things that you can give to your growing child. It will not only help in strengthening the bones of your growing child but is also great for maintaining healthy and strong teeth.

Good for the diabetic patients

When consumed in moderation sugarcane juice may prove to be beneficial for the patients who have diabetes. This is because sugarcane juice has a low glycemic index, which helps in controlling the blood sugar levels.

Helps in preventing cancer

Regular intake of sugarcane juice may help in preventing something as grievous as cancer, especially breast cancer and prostate cancer.

Helps in losing weight

Sugarcane juice for weight loss is very effective and can help you lose weight. This is because the high soluble fibres in sugarcane juice help in managing your weight and it also helps in reducing the bad cholesterol from the body, which is one of the major reasons for weight gain.

Helpful in soothing sore throat

Sugarcane juice has abundant vitamin C in it, which is very effective in soothing an irritated throat.

Helpful in healing wounds

Next time you get a bruise, think of gulping down sugarcane juice. This is because this juice is rich in sucrose, which is a natural healing agent and helps in faster recovery of wounds.

Helpful in enhancing the immunity

If you have low immunity, drinking sugarcane juice on a regular basis may help a great deal. The presence of



anti-oxidants helps in stabilising the bilirubin levels in the body and thus strengthening the immune system in many ways.

Helps in treating acidity

When there is too much acid formation in the stomach, it may lead to heartburns or acidity. Drinking a glass of fresh sugarcane juice may help in feeling better because this juice is alkaline and thus helps in neutralising the stomach acids.

Good for the nails

The nutrients present in sugarcane juice help in dealing with brittle, lifeless and fragile nails. Regular consumption of this juice may get back life, lustre and shine to your nails as they get deeply nourished from inside.

15. Helpful in treating UTI

Urinary tract infections are a painful condition, however, taking sugarcane juice may help ease your discomfort related to UTI. Mix some coconut water and lemon in the sugarcane juice and drink this mixture two times a day to get relief from the burning sensation. The presence of ample amounts of protein also helps in maintaining good kidney health.

Helpful in fever

High body temperature or fever may take a toll on your energy levels and may lead to protein loss. Drinking sugarcane juice helps in restoring the loss of protein levels and also helps in reducing pains and weakness related to fever.

Helps in getting rid of toxins

Being rich in anti-oxidants, a regular dosage of sugarcane juice may help in effectively removing the toxins from the body. Getting rid of toxins also gives a kick to the metabolism, which in turn helps in weight reduction.

Helpful in relieving stress

Stress is one of the major contributors to many serious medical ailments. However, regular intake of this juice may help in reducing the stress levels. Ample amounts of amino acids, magnesium and tryptophan, are beneficial in balancing the hormonal levels and thus reducing stress.

Helpful for cardiovascular health

Substantial amounts of potassium in sugarcane juice are good for heart health. This is because it not only regulates the blood pressure, but it also helps in reducing pressure on the blood vessels, thus reducing any strain to the heart.

Helpful in increasing muscle power

Sugarcane juice health benefits also include increasing muscle power and strength. This is because it contains much-needed amount glucose that is required for healthy muscles.

If you have questions regarding consuming sugarcane juice, we have made efforts in answering some frequently asked questions in this segment:

Is it good to drink sugarcane juice every day?

Sugarcane juice offers a multitude of benefits for our health; therefore, you can safely consume this healthy drink into your daily diet. However, make sure not to exceed your daily intake that is, one glass a day. Drinking large amounts of sugarcane juice may fiddle with your digestion and create other health complications too. Also, if you suffer from any ailment or diseases that may require strict restrictions in your diet, under such situations, it will be a good idea to include sugarcane juice only after your doctor allows you to do so.

2. How can I use sugarcane juice to cure acne?

Sugarcane juice is great for treating skin conditions such as acne because it contains glycolic acid and alpha hydroxy acid that helps in increasing cell turnover.

Are there any side-effects of sugarcane juice?

There are no side-effects caused by the consumption of sugarcane juice; however, one must take care to stick to moderate amounts only. Also, make sure the juice is prepared in hygienic conditions because there is a risk of contamination if proper hygiene is not maintained, especially while having juice from roadside vendors.

Can I drink sugarcane juice after workout?

Yes, you can drink sugarcane juice post working out because it helps in providing instant energy to the body. It also enables you to shed extra kilos because it has a high content of soluble fibres and it also reduces bad cholesterol from the body. This natural drink helps in replenishing the lost minerals and vitamins after a strenuous workout.



Editorial

Kudos to INEC as PVC collection closes

THE collection of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) nationwide ahead of the general elections holding on 25th February and 11th March officially came to a close on the fifth of February, 2023 after an extension of one week from the earlier deadline of January 29, 2023. At the end of the exercise, Nigerians across board have commended the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, for a job well done by allowing more voters collect their Permanent Voter Cards, PVCs.

According to reports, some states recorded as high as seventy five per cent percent in the collection of PVCs and the chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu had also said the Commission is encouraged with the rate of PVC collection across the country, and had assured that the Commission will not hesitate to consider additional measures to ensure that all citizens have ample opportunity to collect their PVCs ahead of the General Elections.

Going by information from the electoral umpire INEC, a total of 93,469,008 registered voters are to vote during the two elections which include the Presidential and National Assembly elections holding on 25th February and that of the governorship and state assembly elections will be conducted on 11th March, in 176,846 polling units across the country with 18 registered political parties participating.

INEC, in furtherance of its preparation for the 2023 general elections scheduled a mock accreditation for voters on 4 February which according to the INEC boss is to further test the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) ahead of deployment for the actual elections. Prof. Yakubu, therefore, revealed that the machines used for the mock exercise would be reconfigured in preparation for the main elections.

The electoral umpire also stated that INEC will be deploying the BVAS machine for the first time in a general election, although the technology has also been deployed in several off-season elections held recently, and assured that no doubt, the mock accreditation exercise will help reassure the general public of the robustness of our system and to further strengthen our processes ahead of the general election in the state.

Although the success so far recorded is highly commendable, there are a number of lapses on the side of the electoral umpire that need to be given attention to so as to avoid same in future exercises. One notable thing is the fact that Nigerians need a lot of enlightenment on what is expected of them as citizens as regards registering, owning their PVCs and coming out on election days to cast their votes.

A very important point to note is that stakeholders in the industry are of the opinion that Nigeria needs to move from the current practice of registering voters only when elections are to be conducted. Nigeria should borrow a leaf from what is obtainable in other climes. Voter registration should be a continuous process so that as a soon as one turns 18, it is automatically updated in the system.

There are concerns also that there are some agencies in Nigeria that need to work together, have inter-agency collaboration. For instance, the Nigeria Metro Commission, NIMC, INEC and other such bodies where there is already a data base of all Nigerians with their bio-data.

Journalism is a profession that deals with coveting analyzing and disseminating information to the public. This means it is a profession with strong social responsibility that is why journalists are required to follow the highest ethical standard in the discharge of their duties.

This is to allow the public to understand what goes on around them as well

Enable them to also contribute their growth in shaping the society towards development peace and progress, unfortunately, quacks have filtered with the profession just by way of cutting out a living not minding what is involved.

Most often, the ethics of journalism have been thrown to the dogs by those individual who parade themselves as journalists who are always seen social gatherings and official function chasing high and profile individual soliciting for interview or patronage which often and with personal demands or monetary reward.

This habit stains the name of the profession and even the name of those engaged in caring on their legitimate duties as reporters or press men generally.

I therefore wish to call on the Nigerian Union of journalists NUJ Plateau State Chapter which is the umbrella body of that practicing journalist profession, to securitize those

Government should boost scrap metal business in Jos

THOSE who engaged in scrap buying business see it as an occupation that can be turned into a money spinner. Scrap metals in the local term is also called east. Here in Jos North the state capital, there are scrap dealers who are involved in the business of scrap metal buying especially anything from metals such as cast, copper, brass, aluminum and other scrap materials with branches all over the state.

The business apart from providing reasonable earnings for both the young and old in the community is one form of business that has been able to take criminals off the streets especially those who desire to make genuine living out of their sweat and are prepared to hustle for their livelihood.

practicing profession in order to rid the profession of "bad eggs" that are spoiling the good image of the profession.

Journalism shapes world, and it would be ignorance on the part of the practioners to give way, to these there ethncal this conduct to ruin it important role it is playing in the society.

Therefore it is my desire that this noble profession be allowed to flourish without any form of interference so

NUJ, please sanitize journalism profession

that societal growth and development can be enhanced.

Parents should be role models of society.

By MUA'ZU ADAM HUDU is a student from Federal Polytechnic Bauchi

Society nowadays is fast basing gauds in respect to the decline in moral rules ether to in displine or negligence on the part of some parents entire how lake languished their roles in imparting positive values within their family circles.

The negative tendencies being witnessed across the



Police curb cult activities in Jenta Apata

PERMIT me space in your daily newspaper to express

my views on the state of Jenta Apata cult activities which is increasing daily in the area.

I want to express my grievances on the rate at which reports of robbery and kidnapping have been the order of the day in the community.

It is now a daily occurrence to find people attacked by cultists mostly at day time and night.

They have succeeded in making life very tensed and miserable for people in that environment.

These cultists disturb shops owners in the environment by breaking their shops at night. They attack individuals in their respective homes and rob them of their phones and other valuables.

It is impossible to send young boys and girls on an errand as they too can be

be in school or should be seen to be involved in doing something worthwhile or learning how to make a decent living from the proctizal point of view are being allowed to stay away into evil act.

Therefore youths should by how inculcate the spirit of using their God given skills to add value to themselves and the society rather than becoming liabilities to society.

By Abdul Azeez Abubakar
From Federal Polytechnic
Bauchi

victims of the attacks.

I wish to kindly appeal to the Plateau State Government and the Nigeria Police to intensify patrol around Jenta Apata ward in order to check the evil activities of these cultists terrorizing the people and making residents to live in fear in their respective homes.

The police or the vigilante should also use their authority to identify the perpetrators so that such menace can be brought to an end and justice served as soon as possible.

I wish to also appeal to the Plateau State Government to please hear the peoples cry and provide them with enough security to guard them and start daily patrois around Jenta Apata area day and night.

John Luka, Jos North.

Standard Cartoon



Opinion

Nigeria: Value system, core values collapse

VALUES mean different things to different people. To some people, values mean the actual worth or importance attached to something.

Values can be defined as ideas, beliefs, principles which we cherish so much that influence or determine how we behave in the society.

The values of a society is her set of beliefs in what is good or bad and they help to control behaviours, decisions, likes and dislikes of the citizens of that particular society.

There are positive values of our society like honesty and transparency, obedience and good moral life. Some negative values in our society include: idleness and laziness, fraud and disorderliness.

Likes include respect to parents, elders, constituted authorities, being law-abiding, punctuality to school/work/business, showing seriousness as it affects our academic work/job etc.

Dislikes among others include fighting, cultism, indecent dressing, telling lies, gossiping, going late to school/work, keeping bad company, engaging in sexual immorality, money-politics, election rigging, examination malpractices, stealing, kidnapping, money-ritual, etc.

When there are no values: People will do what they like to do and not what is right to do. And there will not be a nation for people to have their own world, their own local

By
OBIOTIKA WILFRED TOOCHUKWU

government, states and even federation. Sources from which values are obtained include: ideas in the Constitution, codes of law and religions.

The values of an Igbo man form the characters or personality trait that is found amongst them. The present Government of Anambra State has promised to promote and preserve core Igbo values.

The Government is unrelenting in her programmes of empowerment and promotion of employment opportunities for the youths.

Having eliminated 'Touting', a programme of One Youth, Two Skills has taken over the 21 local governments in the state. "Onye aghana nwanne ya" is an Igbo value. "Aku ezu mkpa" is an Igbo value as well. When an Igbo man celebrates 'New Yam Festival', he celebrates harvest, hard work, and patience.

Values bring unity, promote peace and progress in Igbo communities. Governor C.C Soludo has come for a total turnaround maintenance of the Anambra State economy and promotion of core Igbo values – we must give him our maximum support.

What an individual value will determine his character and principles. Value system therefore guides us as a people, makes us think alike, act alike, and give us a sense of responsibility and belonging as members of a

nation.

The high-incidence of insecurity, terrorism, banditry, and kidnapping in Nigeria portray the values we cherish as a nation. To build a nation, values must be clear, specific and require easy understanding.

It is just few weeks for Nigerians to go to the polls and elect new set of leaders. At this point in the political history of Nigeria, it is pertinent and imminent to elect individuals and not parties with credible and cherished values.

The value system of Nigeria is collapsed. Continuous ASUU strike, examination malpractices, embezzlement of public funds, queuing up to buy fuel, queuing up to get new naira notes and other forms of dishonesty is what Nigerians experience day in day out.

National values are a representation of the paramount values upheld throughout the common cultural experience of the nation. It is the accepted principles or standards of a group of people

Many states in the South East are littered with innocent human blood. We have completely missed the mark of our individualism and communalism. Opposites may attract, but that's not a good rule when it comes to values.

Do we share the same values? What kind of standards do they have about things like money, morals, education etc. We cannot leave out value in comparing growth. Human values affect the different aspects of society in different ways.

Whether it is political, economy, business, education, humanity, technology, ethical. Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, to be sought or avoided.

National values are a representation of the paramount values upheld throughout the common cultural experience of the nation. It is the accepted principles or standards of a group of people.

Security and justice are among the 5 national values in Nigeria but where are we? Value system is a hierarchy of values that all moral beings have, reflected in their choices. We become valuable to the extent we value values. We remain valueless as long as we despise values. We can become a principled Nation if we become a principled people.

Therefore, it is time to vote values, vote principles, vote character, vote capacity, vote competence, vote proven track records (not just party, tribe, religion etc.). The only reason things have value is because of men who value them. Real wealth is men not things.

So many people respect just money. Some people value just money. Demonic activity and Satan worship are on the increase in all parts of the world.

The devil is at work more than at any other time. Bribery has become a social, cultural

and economic epidemic in our society today. We live in a generation where bribery has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society.

Someone expects to be given money or a gift before doing their jobs, even for something as little as pushing a file. Some people give out contracts to contractors with the agreement to get certain amount of money from the contractors after the contracts are executed.

Some government officials who work with regulatory bodies usually take advantage of the organization they regulate. When they go for regular supervisory assignments, they expect the organization being supervised to give them money in order to write good reports about them.

For instance, when a school which has met all requirements for accreditation is being supervised, the supervisory team still expects the school management to bribe them before they accredit the school.

Some ladies will marry a man as old as their father provided, he has money. Some young men are ready kill just to make money.

Our beliefs about the world and our actual experiences shape our values, which in turn form our identity. What we believe is what we experience, which is why our beliefs and values have a discernible impact on our relationships and our work.

Values reflect our sense of right and wrong. They help us create the future we want. The decisions we make everyday are a reflection of our values. Your culture, childhood upbringing, and life experiences can all impact your personal values. They can develop at any stage of life and evolve over time. Everyone has a unique set of values. Our beliefs, our background, education, and our individual and wider social networks influence our value system.

Values will enable individuals to build up enough information, attitude and basic skills that will help you to become responsible, responsive, good and disciplined members of a school, community and society at large. In life, there appears to be many valuable things without which life becomes meaningless and valueless. We attach values to things because they serve useful purposes. Our parents, elders, relatives, teachers, friends, classmates, Priests, Imams are some of the people we attach value to, and most importantly, God is valuable to us.

Finally, when everything around you is uncertain, the key to stability is to focus on unchangeable truth. You need to focus on what never changes. God's word and God's character. To replace your panic with prayer, your worry with worship, and your anxiety with adoration, focus less on what social media and the news and other people are saying and more on God's unchanging truth. A new Nigeria is Possible!

"Values will enable individuals to build up enough information, attitude and basic skills that will help you to become responsible, responsive, good and disciplined members of a school, community and society at large. In life, there appears to be many valuable things without which life becomes meaningless and valueless. We attach values to things because they serve useful purposes. Our parents, elders, relatives, teachers, friends, classmates, Priests, Imams are some of the people we attach value to, and most importantly, God is valuable to us."

THE negative implication of projecting the rising security challenges in Nigeria on social and conventional media, could not only be destructive but can be wittingly or unwittingly encouraging the perpetrators to do more.

Although, Journalists report criminal incidents on the conventional media in order to inform the general public of the incident and to be security-conscious of their place of abode. But mind you, the gunmen, whether "known or unknown", should not be given that prominence on pages of the newspapers as the non-media practitioners do on Facebook and other non-conventional media.

These days, social media spaces are being awashed with the horrible news of killings, armed robbery attacks, Kidnapping, Assassination and other appallingly despicable acts that ought not to be imagined nor witnessed in our time.

It is a truism that the emergence of social media – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube – are for the aid of dissemination of information across the world, but their unnecessary usage has created tension across the world through the posting of unverified

Insecurity and negative implications on Social Media

By **SAMPSON UHUEGBU**

information.

Insecurity has remained one of the challenges facing leaders of the world lately. Unfortunately, wars being fought against these issues are defeated because the perpetrators are unrepentant. They are always ready to achieve their goal of launching attacks on the government infrastructures, killings and destruction of lives and hard-earned properties.

To be frank, the invention of social media has brought about quick information dissemination across the world. It has contributed to the sourcing of information and acquisition of knowledge.

Millions of people around the world use social media to share information and make connections. On a personal level, social media allows us to communicate with friends and family, learn new things, develop our interests, and be entertained. On a professional level, we have used social media to broaden our knowledge and build our professional network by connecting with people.

The promotion of insecurity has

deeply aided the disruption of economic activities across the country. Daily sad news has continued to portray the country in a negative light.

Perhaps, the persistent security issues in Nigeria might have been surmounted if the operations of these hoodlums were neither given attention to nor posted on social media.

The projection of killings and other criminal activities on the spaces should be only targeted at opening the eyes of the general public and not necessarily to praise the suspects, who perpetrate the horrible acts of destruction on the peoples' hard-earned property and maiming of lives.

The rising level of immodest behaviours today, which should have been nipped in the bud by parents, guardians, teachers, religious leaders, traditional rulers and other stakeholders, are getting out of proportion.

Recently, I spotted about six boys, whose age could be in their early thirties, brandishing pistols through an open-roof vehicle along Owerri-

Okigwe road. To my greatest amazement, the onlookers were hailing, clapping and chanting songs for them over the "exposure" in a broad daylight.

When I enquired to know what could have prompted their debasing actions, I was told that one of the boys was the bereaved son of the deceased woman whose corpse was being ferried in an ambulance during a motorcade from the mortuary on that faithful day. I shook my head in bewilderment.

Hyping insecurity in whatsoever guise

doesn't aid in abating it. It rather worsens it. It creates tension and fear in the lives of the public.

Blames have always been apportioned on the National Censors Board for having failed in one of its official responsibilities of censoring movies, and phasing out ones that are devoid of good morals. This is because society is affected negatively or positively through the theme of a movie.

"Insecurity has remained one of the challenges facing leaders of the world lately. Unfortunately, wars being fought against these issues are defeated because the perpetrators are unrepentant. They are always ready to achieve their goal of launching attacks on the government infrastructures, killings and destruction of lives and hard-earned properties."

Feature

Cashless economy with tears

Cashless economy is the vogue in many digital economies of the world, and Nigeria does not want to be caught napping, or so it seems. Countries that have since gone cashless include India, Sweden, Denmark, USA, UK, Finland, Singapore, Netherlands and Norway. In Africa, South Africa, Kenya and Egypt are implementing the cashless policy with little or no crisis. How Nigeria blends with the digital trend matters a lot in view of the peculiar nature of the country's economy which has an active Small and Medium Enterprises, SMEs, most of which rely on physical cash for their daily transactions, writes Hameed M. Bello.

THE Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, holds the task of working out the modalities for a cashless economy, but the apex bank has come under intense storm in the last couple of weeks following its chaotic Naira redesign and swap leaving on its trail hardship for the commoners. The elite care less since they can find their way. The African economic giant, Nigeria's desire to migrate to a cashless economy where financial transactions can proceed with little or no cash is demonstrated by the introduction by the CBN of the Bank Verification Number, BVN, the digital online banking facilities including the electronic transfer window, the e-Naira, and now the redesigning of the currency. The bitcoin is also gaining popularity.

The e-Naira, for instance, is a CBN-issued digital currency that provides a unique form of money denominated in Naira. It serves as both a medium of exchange and a store of value, supposedly offering better payment prospects in retail transactions when compared to cash payments, according to the enaira.gov.ng.

No doubt these policies can boost the economy in the long run, but their timing and implementation seem to have cast a dark shadow on their likely benefits.

To say that Nigerians have come under untold hardship in the last couple of weeks on account of the new Naira policy is to put it mildly. From the cities to the villages, the story is not any different, of widespread liquidity crunch making SMEs to be grounded, and survival to become difficult for the ordinary folks.

However, the reality is that the banks are not issuing enough new notes, neither are the Automated Teller Machines, ATMs dispensing reasonable cash. The deposit money banks, otherwise known as commercial banks, are either not happy with the new notes and are holding them back, or they are making some brisk business behind the scenes with the notes. The new notes have become even more scarce than petrol, notorious for its recurrent scarcity. This, for many Nigerians, is like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire with the attendant suffering on the people.

There have been public outrage and anger over the frustrating experience of not being able to access legitimate funds to push businesses through, to cater for daily feeding needs, or to pay bills. For example, last week, I met a young man in his early twenties in one of the banks who was threatening that Nigerians have not seen anything yet, that the ENDSARS protest would be a child's play to what he said was going to come. Whether he was blarbing out of frustration, or was driven by hunger or some inexplicable condition, only God knows.

Except that the tone of his threats was laden with a bold determination. According to him, he had been to countless banks in Utako where he lived to access money from his account to no avail.

Before my exit, I also heard the angry young man threatening to storm the bank the following day to show them his real colour. I was wondering what he was going to do.



Buhari

Was he going to mobilise his friends to cause mayhem, or he was going to forcibly demand the bank manager to give him money by all means, I reflected. I concluded that he might have been prompted by frustration, coupled with his youthful exuberance.

And last Thursday also, a coalition of Civil Society Groups on Marina Road, Lagos protested with banners reading "Banks are Saboteurs of CBN's new naira notes" with the protesters chanting "Enough is enough". The demonstrators' spokesman who wielded a loud speaker said roughly: "We have gone to ATMs, we cannot access the naira new notes, we have gone to banks, we are here at the Central Bank of Nigeria, who said they have given the new naira notes to the banks, and that is why the Civil society leaders have taken it upon themselves to storm various banks and tell them to stop suffering Nigerians." Analysis of the speaker's words suggests that he believed in the claim by the CBN that it had issued enough new notes to the deposit banks. He accordingly exonerated the CBN and pointed accusing fingers at the deposit banks he took to task to 'stop suffering Nigerians.'

The experience in so many banking outlets had been depressing. Apart from the noisy, long and rancorous queues, the old notes were not accessible, neither were the new ones. Buying and selling have been inconclusive because the buyers won't accept transfer of money, and the Point of Sale, POS, machine operators had no cash to give. The buyers were desperate but had to go away in pain and anger. Unfortunately, the e-payment services like transfers also became problematic due to all kinds of error messages. There were connectivity or network failures either from the issuing or the receiving banks. This has been the sorry state of so many Nigerians.

The Governor of the Central Bank of

Nigeria (CBN), Godwin Emefiele, last Tuesday said before the House of Representatives ad-hoc committee on the review of the Bank's cashless policy that the project was for the overall interest of Nigerians and the economy. Emefiele said the old notes would lose their legal tender status on February 10, 2023, and that about N1.9 trillion had so far been collected since the commencement of the exercise. He said that the currency redesign policy had so far recorded about a 75 per cent success rate.

Recall that Kaduna state Governor, Nasiru el Rufai had last week raised the poser as to whether there were any nexus between 2023 elections and the Naira notes swap. el-Rufai had claimed that some persons at the presidential villa wanted the All Progressives Congress (APC) to lose the presidential election. The Federal Government and the Presidency however debunked the claim, saying that the President was fully in support of the success of the APC and its presidential candidate. Responding to the issue of the Naira swap policy, el-Rufai said "Nigerians should know that these policies are not policies of our party but some economists who are bent on making sure that we lose the election. Policies purposely designed to crash the political process." This suggests that Emefiele may be working in cahoots with some 'unknown' persons in the President's kitchen cabinet who are against the success of the APC in the presidential election. These are weighty allegations that should not be swept under the carpet on grounds of reconciliation.

In October, the CBN had announced that the old 200, 500 and 1000 naira notes would cease to be legal tender by January 31. But the bank extended the deadline to February 10 after protests by citizens. And last Thursday, the CBN had directed deposit money banks (DMBs) to commence the payment of the redesigned naira notes over the



Emefiele

counter, subject to a maximum daily payout limit of N20,000. This, too, is counterproductive to open market transactions in remote areas.

Meanwhile, President Muhammadu Buhari recently at a meeting with some governors urged citizens to give him seven days to resolve the cash crunch that has become a problem across the country from the policy of the CBN to change high value Naira notes with new ones. "I will revert to the CBN and the Minting Company. There will be a decision one way or the other in the remaining seven days of the 10-day extension," the President said.

The Governors had told the President that while they agreed that his decision on the renewal of currency was good and they were fully in support, its execution had been botched and their constituents were becoming increasingly upset.

Later that Friday, the President while tweeting via @MBuhari at 1:32 pm on February 3, 2023 said inter alia: "I am aware of the cash shortages and hardship being faced by people and businesses, on account of the Naira redesign. I want to assure you that we are doing everything to resolve these issues. Nigerians should expect significant improvements between now and the February 10 deadline.

"I met with a delegation of Governors today, on the matter. All the complaints about the execution of the currency change are being seriously looked into. I will ensure that everything is resolved in a lasting manner, and we will all enjoy the long-term benefits of the decision."

A reply by @quincypetersjr to Mr President's tweets at 2:34 pm reads: "Your excellency Sir, please allow more time for these new notes to circulate. I know it might be in our best interest but of what use will that be when there is chaos everywhere and people are hungry. I pray thee to kindly extend the deadline even further and allow both to coexist for

now."

Another reply to the President's tweet from @FreemAn_Jiw at 2:48 pm said: "There can never be positive change without sacrifice. We have endured changes that were to our detriment and we survived. If this will benefit us in the long run as you have said, then let's endure a bit more."

I have no reason to doubt the authenticity of the tweets by the President because they have not been denied to have come from him by his handlers. The success of the cashless policy, including the redesign and swap of the Naira, is lofty and welcome because Nigeria cannot operate in isolation from the rest of the world. However, its implementation by institutions of government should aid the growth of the economy, and not to stifle it. A lot of money has been lost since the announcement of the new Naira policy due to inconclusive transactions and businesses. As said by one of the tweets in response to the President, it is not impossible to allow the old notes and the new ones to coexist side by side for a reasonable time until much after the elections, after which the public and the deposit banks must have psychologically prepared themselves for the final withdrawal of the old notes.

The President should act fast to restore sanity in the financial sector since the buck finally stops at his desk as the 'Governor General' of the CBN. The 7 days window he promised should bring about a change that Nigerians can relate with, and not the one that will make them frown at his legacies on the economy. The President may also consider reversing the N20, 000 maximum daily over the counter withdrawal announced by the CBN. This will kill SMEs and petty trading in the open markets in the rural areas which have proved to be reasonable economic drivers.

News

Forgiveness Day: Crisis merchants warned against disrupting peace

By PALANG KASMI

Apparently satisfied with the major role Plateau is playing in Nigeria's political and economic scene, Plateau State Governor, Simon Bako Lalong has advised crisis merchants not to disrupt the peace the state is enjoying.

Likewise, a University on, Prof. Dakas C.J Dakas has tasked leaders in Plateau to manage their diversity in constructive ways to bring about development to the state.

They both made the call Monday February 6, 2023 during a symposium and state banquet held at Government House, Jos as part of activities to mark the 2023 Plateau Day of Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

Presenting a paper with the theme: "Plateau State in the Comity of States: The Journey So Far", Dakas urged leaders and stakeholders in the state to realise that with over 53 ethnic groups, there should be inclusiveness and tolerance of each other for peaceful coexistence to thrive.

The don advised that it is only through actions and activities that foster harmonious coexistence that there would be peaceful coexistence and development in the economy and other sectors of the state.

"There is no meaningful development without peace" the paper pointed out, urging the state government to employ proactive measures in addressing insecurity in the state".

He highlighted that education is a critical tool that can be used to enlighten Plateau people on the implications of insecurity even as he stressed that clerics who ignite tensions and cause conflicts through their inciting speeches should be held accountable.

Dakas congratulated the state for the commemoration of Plateau Day and advised citizens to see it as a period for the state to reflect on its progress and challenges.

"Plateau people should resolve to work together for the state progress," he said noting that already the state government had created an enabling environment for investors through its One Stop Centre, which was established to handle bureaucratic bottlenecks, and the state has prospects of achieving more in peace building, through empowering youths with opportunities to discourage them from being engaged by crisis merchants.

"Vibrant labour force will prevent a perpetual vicious circle of dependents," he said.

Similarly, Governor Lalong in his remarks at the forum said he was glad that Plateau State has played and is still playing a key role in the political process in Nigeria with landmark records and references in virtually all sectors.

He said despite the numerous challenges and



Lalong

setbacks encountered in the course of the journey to statehood, there is so much to celebrate and look forward to with hope and optimism. He pointed out that the role his administration has played in the past 8 years has made peace and security a cardinal priority.

He praised his administrations birth of the Plateau Peace Building Agency as the implementing agency for reconciliation and the healing process which he described as an affirmation of their commitment to building a state that is inclusive, free of violence, mistrust and general instability.

"We are happy that our efforts today are yielding positive results considering the fact that life has substantially returned to all aspects of the state and economic activities are in full swing. Indeed, the benefits of

peace are very evident with the influx of people into Plateau State for national and international conferences, tourism and leisure as well as residency".

"Hosting this year's Plateau Day and Day of Forgiveness and Reconciliation therefore brings so much hope, optimism and a sense of fulfillment to the people because we have reset Plateau on the path of growth and prosperity. We shall continue to count on the cooperation of the citizens and the goodwill of our friends within and outside the country as well as our local and international partners".

He gave special tribute to Plateau's founding fathers and leaders who at various times made sacrifices to lay the foundation of a great Plateau. According to Lalong: "We shall never allow their sacrifices to go in vain nor mortgage the future of our children for any

Report any land grabbing attempt to government - Lalong

By Palang Kasmi

PLATEAU State Governor, Simon Bako Lalong has urged communities to take advantage of the Anti Land Grabbing Law of 2020 in the state to report any attempt by anyone to take their land by force.

He has also advised that rather than going to the social media to play politics of blackmail with such matters, persons or communities whose land has been forcefully taken should formally write government, stakeholders or approach the court directly for redress.

The governor said this on Sunday 5th February 2023 at St. Monica's Catholic Church Rantya, Jos, during the interdenominational Church service to commemorate the 2023 Plateau Day of Forgiveness.

At the Church service, attended by top government functionaries, politicians, and

stakeholders in the state, Lalong stated that "This is to help in restoring order, and to strengthen, deepen the peace, and security of our land which was previously truncated before we came into office. We strongly believe that peace and security is the foundation upon which every other thing stands," he said.

He added that despite passing the Anti Land Grabbing Law, insinuations are making rounds but no official complaint has been put on his table that a village has been taken over by herdsmen.

The governor pointed out: "Permit me to use this opportunity to clarify the insinuation being made by some people that some villages have been taken over by herdsmen in the state and that the government has not done anything about it".

"As the Governor, I can say authoritatively that there is no

From ABBAS GUNGURA, Bauchi

Bauchi State Governor, Bala Mohammed has assured that ongoing road construction project linking Dass Local Government Area with Bununu, the headquarters of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area is going to be completed in good time.

The Governor made this known while addressing party supporters during his re-election campaign tour in Dass Local Government Area of the state, weekend.

"We have sped up work on the project with the aim of completing it in good time. The other road that we are working on, from Rimin. Ziyam to Palama, to Bazali and to Dass will also be completed", he said.

The Governor who promised to build the proposed college of education in the area, lamented that Dass is the only Emirate Council in the state that does not have tertiary institution.

While appreciating the people of the area for being loyal and supportive to his administration, Bala Mohammed called on them not to be deceived by the opposition ahead of upcoming general elections.

"Dass to me is a home coming, I wouldn't have come for campaigns but I have to come so that I can show appreciation and respect for you", he said.

Bala Mohammed added, "we have met with traditional and religious leaders, youth groups and other stakeholders and party leaders, now we are meeting with you to tell you why we are seeking for second term". Bala who said that his administration has

Governor promises to complete roads if re-elected



Bala

commenced a lot of projects, out of which some are completed while others are ongoing, assured that when given the second mandate, he will complete them and even do much more to the benefit of the citizens.

The Governor while stating that his administration has since inception in 2019 embarked on building and renovation of hospitals and schools, pleaded for additional four years tenure to enable his administration execute more developmental projects.

"We are seeking for your

favour to enable us win the forthcoming election from the presidency down to state assembly, so that we can consolidate on the gains so far achieved", the Governor said.

According to the governor, himself and his team would keep to their electioneering campaign promises if given the mandate.

Governor Bala Mohammed also pledged never to be the kind of politicians who only come back four years after winning election only to seek for another mandate.

CBN, EFCC enforces compliance of cash circulation by banks in Gombe

From WILLIE ATTAH, Gombe

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has visited some commercial banks in Gombe metropolis to ensure compliance and proper circulation of the new naira notes in the State.

The team which was led by Mr Yusuf Philip-Yila, Director, Development Finance

Department, CBN Directorate Headquarters, also had personnel of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) who were expected to ensure that cash released to the banks were made available to the public.

According to Yila, the exercise was to ensure complete compliance to CBN's directives to commercial banks on over the counter

payment of N20,000 daily withdrawals by customers.

He stated also that the exercise was part of efforts to guard against violation of the directed guidelines as well as address challenges militating against cash circulation in the state.

He noted that the visit afforded CBN the opportunity to interact as well as caution commercial banks against any attempts to sabotage the circulation of the new notes.

The apex bank official disclosed that some of the challenges observed especially with cash dispensing through Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) were addressed during the visit.

He said, the management of the concerned banks were engaged in order to improve circulation of the new notes through the ATMs.

According to him, more of the new notes had been made available to commercial banks towards improving the ease of doing business and also to make the new Naira notes readily available to citizens of the state.

"We are enforcing the directive of the Governor, Mr. Godwin Emefiele, who has directed banks to commence paying customers new Naira notes Over The Counter (OTC), subject to a maximum daily payout limit of N20,000," he added.

Mr. Yusuf Philip-Yila disclosed that the exercise was also intended to reduce queues around ATMs in the state.

Commercial banks visited included Polaris, Keystone, Zenith, Unity, Heritage, First

not spare anyone who tries to lay claim on any inch of Plateau State that does not belong to him. Not under my watch".

He said Plateau is a great state that has been blessed by God and destined for greatness despite the setbacks experienced in its 47 years of creation. And that fact explains why the state remains a melting pot for people from all parts of the world, while the natural endowments it has remains a source of attraction.

In his homily, Catholic Archbishop of Jos, Most Rev. Ishaya Audu who cited scriptures from Matt 18: 29, James 2:13 and Matt 6:14, stressed that Christians who are the salt of the earth are expected to pull down all barriers for peaceful coexistence, tolerance, good neighbourliness and mutual respect to thrive

Prayers were offered for God's blessings upon Plateau State and Nigeria.

report on my table that any village has been taken over. It is to prevent such from happening that we passed and signed into law the Anti-Land Grabbing law in 2020".

"By this law, anyone whose land has been forcefully taken is expected to write to me, his traditional ruler, Local Government Chairman, elected representative or even approach the court directly for redress. So far, no one or any community has done so".

"But I want the world to know that what we have been doing is to return displaced persons who fled their homes due to attacks back to their ancestral lands. For example, the site for the construction of a Police Mobile Barracks in Kakuruk, Gashish District Barkin Local Government has been handed over to the contractor who will start work immediately to provide security for the people to return to their lands".

"I promise you that we will

NEWS

Tyoden condoles press secretary over wife's demise

By DUMAH RANDONG

THE Deputy Governor of Plateau State, Professor Sonni Tyoden has sympathised with his Press Secretary, Domnan Wetkum over the demise of his wife, Mrs Rahila Wetkum.

Professor Tyoden who led a government delegation and staff of his office to condole the deceased family in Kwang, Jos South Local Government Area of the state, Monday, said as believers, no one could question the will of God but rather accept it in good faith.

He encouraged the family to take solace in God and pray for the reposed of her soul. Narrating the incident that led to her death, husband of the deceased, Mr Domnan Wetkum, explained that she was ill for just two days before her demise.

He appreciated the Deputy Governor for the visit, stressing that he was really



Tyoden

showed that there was cordial working relationship amongst the staff. Mrs Rahila Wetkum died on Saturday at the age of 41 after a brief illness leaving behind her husband and a daughter. adding that their coming really

showed that there was cordial working relationship amongst the staff. Mrs Rahila Wetkum died on Saturday at the age of 41 after a brief illness leaving behind her husband and a daughter.

THREE persons were on Monday confirmed dead after gunmen attacked the Maiyanga community in Bokkos LGA of Plateau State. It was gathered that two other persons sustained gunshot injuries during the attack which occurred on Sunday night.

A resident of Maiyanga community, Bulusule, who confirmed the attack to The PUNCH in Jos on Monday, said those injured had been evacuated to the hospital where they are currently receiving treatment

3 killed as gunmen attack Plateau village

Sule said, "It was last night (Sunday) that the gunmen came and attacked the people in Maiyanga community. They shot three persons dead while two persons sustained gunshot injuries. The shooting was just too much. Right now, the community is in pain."

Another resident of the community, who identified himself as Ilya, condemned the killing of the villagers.

According to him, the attack had been reported to the

security agents who, he said, arrived in the community some hours after the gunmen had fled the scene.

He called on the government to beef up security in the community to forestall further attacks on the people.

The spokesman for the Plateau State Police Command, Alabo Alfred, did not take his calls when contacted on the attack at the time of filing this report.

Ortom shuns Atiku campaign, Ayu slams gov

BENUE State Governor, Samuel Ortom, his deputy, Benson Abounu, commissioners, aides and the 22 local government chairmen of the state were absent at the campaign rally of the presidential candidate of Peoples Democratic Party, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar.

Benue is being controlled by PDP with the national chairman of the party, Senator Iyorchia Ayu, hailing from the state.



Ortom

Leading the campaign rally for Atiku in the state are former governor of the state, Senator Gabriel Suswam, former president of the Senate, David Mark, and the three senators representing Zone A, B and C; Suswam, Orkerjev and Abba Moro, were in attendance.

Also, the party governorship candidate and his deputy, Titus Uba and John Ngbede, respectively, and some state working committee members attended the rally.

Speaking at the rally, Ayu appealed to Ortom, who had not shown support for Atiku, to join hands with the party to be able to rescue the country.

Ayu said that he met with one of the G-5 governors, the Abia State Governor, Okezie Ikpeazu, two days ago and also urged him to work with them.

Ayu said, "What we have is some of our members who are aggrieved but we are appealing to Governor Ortom to come back and join us to rescue the country. Governor Ortom has nowhere to go. We have already resolved our issue with Governor of Abia State,

Okezie Ikpeazu. I was with him two days ago and he has agreed to work for the success of our party."

Atiku, while speaking with the mammoth crowd at the rally, promised to ensure that the crisis between the people of the state and Fulani herders would be resolved if voted into office.

He said, "I am the umbrella of Tiv people worldwide. If you vote for me, I will make sure peace return to Benue State. I will come to the state and make sure Fulani signs a peace pact with the people of the state."

Atiku also promised that the \$10m promised in his blueprint would be injected into the economy to create jobs for the youth.

He further assured the people of Benue State that he would fix the federal roads that pass through the state, just as he promised to reopen the railway line that passed through the state and ensure that the Academic Staff Union of Universities no longer embarks on strike.

I never promised to fix power in six months

THE Minister of Works and Housing, Babatunde Fashola, has denied saying that the present administration will fix power in Nigeria within six months.

He made the denial when he

featured as a guest on Channels TV's 'Politics Today' on Monday night.

Fashola told the interviewer that the statement attributed to him was a lie which he

merely allowed to run.

The former Minister of Power said: "One of the things that was said about me was that I said we will electrify Nigeria in six months. It is a lie that I allowed to run until the day I

— Fashola

asked my media men to play the tape back.

"And since then, that lie has gone. Don't say things that I didn't say."

2023 Census: Bayelsa reviews preparation

THE Bayelsa State Government, on Monday, made an appraisal and review of preparations in the state towards the national population census scheduled to hold nationwide next month.

The government has also put plans in place to intensify public awareness of the forthcoming census through radio jingles and the printing of posters, banners and flyers to be distributed to all towns and communities across the eight Local Government Areas.

The Deputy Governor of the State, Senator Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo, disclosed this while briefing the Heads of Local Government, and the chairmen and secretaries of the census committees set up at the Local Government level, at a meeting in Government House, Yenagoa.

The Deputy Governor explained that much work is needed to be done, in order to create the necessary awareness among the Bayelsa populace concerning the 2023 census exercise.

He noted that the State Government was ready to do everything necessary for the smooth conduct and success of the population headcount in the state by the National Population Commission (NPC). Senator Ewhrudjakpo, therefore, appealed to all stakeholders to give maximum cooperation to the Commission before, during and after the crucial national assignment.

He assured the State Director of the NPC and the Local Government Coordinators that the government would provide logistics to ease the movement of personnel and materials across the state,

while the Local Government Councils would provide accommodation for equipment.

His words, "In terms of commitment, willingness and determination, the State Government is ready. The State Government will work closely with the National Population Commission (NPC) to achieve success in the exercise.

"I think the State has done what is needed to be done. All our communities have formed their census committees, so we are fully prepared for it.

"The NPC will make its jingle for the exercise available to be aired. We will also develop jingles to meet our local needs, and print posters and flyers and start posting them across the state."

Earlier in her remarks, the State Director of the National Population Commission, Mrs. Evelyn Micah, expressed

gratitude to the State Government for its support and preparedness to make the census a huge success in Bayelsa.

Mrs Micah, who pointed out that the 2023 national digital census was strategically important to the nation, said the most vital thing needed at the moment was publicity to create adequate public awareness, especially in the rural areas.

She also stressed the need for the provision of logistics to motivate ad hoc staff, and the engagement of guides in the various communities to accompany the enumerators to move from point to point. Briefings on the level of recruitment and training of ad-hoc staff for the census across the eight Local Governments were also given at the meeting by the Local Government Coordinators.

Police arraign woman for stealing employer's N2.3 million

THE defendant, who resides in Oko Oba, Agege, Lagos State, however, pleaded not guilty to the one-count charge of stealing.

The prosecutor, Akeem Raji, told the court that the defendant committed the offence in June 2022 at No. 1 Ogundele Street, Agege.

According to Mr Raji, the complainant, Musiliudeen Ogundele, runs a charity organisation named Ajoke 21st Charity Foundation.

The prosecutor said the

defendant stole N2.3 million from the organisation and absconded.

The alleged offence contravenes section 287 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

The chief magistrate, B.O. Osunsanmi, granted the defendant N200,000 bail with two sureties in like sum.

Ms Osunsanmi adjourned the case until March 13 for mention.

(NAN)



Diri



Alkali



By CELESTINE ATTSAR

Nigeria's lack of political will to tackle corruption

IT is true that fighting corruption especially in a developing society like Nigeria is a very heavy task that must involve everybody, that is, if it is to succeed. Dr. Ngozi Ikonjo-Iweala former minister in Nigeria and present Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in her book; "Fighting Corruption is dangerous" narrated how the government she was serving then was engulfed in corruption by those holding influential positions in the then government of former President Jonathan and how she tried to see that it was minimize but that nearly caused her dare consequences and life of her mother.

As it is, Nigeria is considered to be one of the most corrupt nations in the World. As at the last rating of Transparency International (TI), the country though very rich in both human and natural resources, its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is very low.

The present administration came

under the mantra of fighting security and corruption in order to change the fortunes of its citizens, as the government before could not do it as expected. That has not been achieved from all indications of the happenings in Nigeria.

Though the previous governments did establish some Institutions that were empowered to collaborate with other Institutions to fight the menace, it has also not done well in the eyes of Nigerians as those accused of corruption based on the positions they held are still moving freely and still participating in political activities and even contesting political offices.

Whistle blowing was introduced as a way of involving all Nigerians in the fight against corruption. Very few people came out to report suspicious transaction or hidden money, especially which involved reward to the whistle blower. Though that approach yielded little fruits, but it was a good approach in fighting this monster that is gradually eating deep into our system and when not handled with urgency, it will one day consume the whole country.

Recent developments about corruption in Nigeria revealed that the custodians of agencies saddled with the

responsibilities of fighting about 190 inmates corruption have descended on him for themselves become part allegedly prosecuting them despite collecting bribes while in office. From this report, it is very clear that the suspended police officer and his men infringed on the rights of Nigerians who wanted to retaliate when they found themselves in the same situation in Kuje prison.

It was another shocking story when the Economic and Financial Crime Commission EFCC arrested another top government official who is the custodian of the finances of the country that is the Accountant General of the Federation, Mr. Ahmed Idris in connection with the diversion of funds amounting to over 80 billion Naira. The EFCC verified intelligence showed that the AGF raked off the funds through bogus consultancy and other illegal activities using proxies, family members and close associates.

The arrest of the suspended AGF followed his failure to honour invitations to respond to "As it is now, Nigeria is considered to be one of the most corrupt nations in the World. As at the last rating of Transparency International (TI), that the country though very rich in both human and natural resources its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is very low".



charges in connection with illegal activities. The alleged stolen funds were said to be laundered through real estate investment in Kano, Abuja, Dubai and other countries. Perhaps, Hushuppi, Idris as in other cases did not want to die alone or go to jail alone, that was why some few weeks after his arrest and detention he started cooperating with the EFCC which led to the arrest of the former governor of Zamfara state Abdulaziz Yari in connection with over 20 billion naira fraud. And the man is threatening to call more names which could be more interesting in the coming days ahead.

As it is now, the search light seems to be seriously focused on those in government and occupying sensitive positions. Just as the case

of the suspended AGF has shown. While Nigeria and Nigerians appreciate the suspension of the AGF and the internet fraudster Hushuppi for exposing the network of those involved in embezzling the resources of the country, the agencies that are saddled with the responsibility of fighting these menace should not relent in their efforts to reduce it to the barest minimum by also ensuring diligence in order to come up with concrete facts that can be used in prosecuting offenders.

It is very important for the political class to know that the survival of our democracy depends on how the country is govern by them. It is very important also that the public should use the window of whistle blowing opportunity that the government is encouraging to expose those acquiring properties that are beyond their means without any explanation. The fight against corruption is not a one man fight but a fight that each and every one of us must have a hand in killing this monster that is eating every fabric of our society in terms of development and integrity as a nation.



By Yvonne Ishola

Checking excesses of security operatives

universities have been forced out of school due to ASUU strike which has lasted 6 months and it is still going. In this predicament and being bombarded left right and centre by security challenge, the last thing these youth need is to be picked at by our security operatives. It is like running to a friend when in trouble only for the friend to do more harm to one than what one was running from.

The issue of marlian came and has recruited most of our youth. Some of them blindly joined the band wagon. Keeping dreads is one of their identities.

From the inception of marlian till today, our young boys have been suffering harassment in the hands of security operatives till date. Stories abound where an innocent young man would be stopped by security men as he goes about his legitimate business.

Last Sunday I was a witness as my young boy was picked out of the commercial vehicle we were travelling in from Abuja. We had just passed Tarara. The security man asked the driver to move pass the check point and wait.

I jumped out of the car immediately the car parked

and picking my identity card, I hurried to where the security operative was seriously interrogating my son as if he was a criminal. He was armed and also carried along a hefty stick which looked menacing. My heart bleated as I rushed waving my ID card.

The security man warned me sternly to stay put or get arrested. Confused, I stopped in my tracks.

One of them was approaching from the other side of the check point, so I told him that I was a journalist and I was just doing my job being curious about what was happening and I needed answers.

By that time, the security operative had brought out a scissors and was threatening to cut my sons hair. I looked perplexed wondering what was wrong with my sons hair. It was not dreads, just a hairstyle with the all the sides very low and the front to the middle part full of hair. Is that offensive?

The other security operative reported what I said when he arrived there. Shortly afterwards, my son joined us. It was only then that every passenger entered the car. Most of the ladies had their phones ready to video tape

what ever the security operatives planned doing. I took my seat with the solemn promise to write and expose the victimisation that takes place on Nigeria's roads in the middle of nowhere.

With the number of things we have to contend with on the roads- kidnappers, bandits, hostile communities (if a crisis took place that the driver was ignorant of), armed robbers, reckless drivers, are we to add this to our list?

As to be expected, passengers started sharing their experiences. A lady said this issue of harassment of young boys and men almost cost them their lives on a journey she embarked on from Abuja.

The security operatives wasted their time barbering 2 young male passengers hair, not minding the fact that they had a long journey ahead of them. The driver of their car was in so much hurry to cover the dreadful part of the shortcut before dusk that they almost ran into a stationary trailer. That would have been disastrous.

Another passenger said when the security operatives were about to barber his hair, he paid his way through. He said he was lucky he had

some cash on him or he would have been disgraced before his girlfriend.

It is not an action that takes place only on our highways, far from prying eyes. This is a common occurrence according to my colleagues experience. In her own case, her son was driving them around Jos Town when security operatives made them to park. Her son was asked to disembark and the security operatives barber his dreads unevenly.

This brings to mind Ripji Bala's case who was arrested along with some youth in Hwolshe. Their sin was the fact that they were wearing dread locks. Unfortunately, Ripji Bala lost his life due to a misunderstanding. He was shot dead by the guard on duty who thought they were trying to escape not knowing that they were released.

What has EndSARS achieved if our youth are still harassed by gun wielding security operatives? We are told that the police is your friend. Please live up to that. The soldiers are our defenders. Please help us to feel secure around you.

Secondly chiefs, investigate these allegations and bring perpetrators to book. Except if hairstyle is an offence, I see

it as a distraction that is pushing our youth to the wall.

Commuters, this is an area of technological advancement. If any passenger is being victimized, video tape and forward immediately. This way, it would put fear in the perpetrators, serve as evidence and deterrent to evil minded ones.

“With the number of things we have to contend with on the roads- kidnappers, bandits, hostile communities (if a crisis took place that the driver was ignorant of), armed robbers, reckless drivers, are we to add this to our list? As to be expected, passengers started sharing their experiences. A lady said this issue of harassment of young boys and men almost cost them their lives on a journey she embarked on from Abuja.”

”

By EZEKIEL DONTINNA

IT was more or less an unexpected opening of unread page when stakeholders from the Nigerian Police, Civil Society Organisations and Media Professionals engaged in interactive session, they poured out their minds to unravel the string tied on the wound that affects their working relationship.

The most interesting part of it was how at both sides, participants voiced out their reservations at each other. The Police were throwing their brimstone at the Journalists that, Journalists do not always report their success stories, but prefer reporting negative stories instigating the public against them.

That, really sparked a prolonged argument among the Police, CSOs and the Journalists as it was moderated by the Senior Fellow, Research Directorate, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) Kuru, Dr. Theophilus Danjuma Sheshi, who stood in for Professor Pam Dung Sha, as Chairman of the training.

The Journalists on their part with Yemi Kosoko, of Channels Television, Aminu Edegwu of Daily Trust newspaper, Polycarp Auta, of NAN, Danjuma Auta, of Today Challenge and Marie-theres Nanlong, of Vanguard newspaper raised issues on how the Police should respond to calls and feed them with appropriate and timely information about happenings to cement the gap between them.

The Civil Society Organisations were not left out in the argument as they also called on the Police to step down this training to the other ranks for them to understand that they were partners in the fight against injustice because most of them are ignorant and sometimes rude and unbecoming to their personnel seeking for justice.

However, at the end of this mind refreshing interactive session where comments, questions and responses were entertained. The participants later came to an understanding that team work pays and was the only way out for them to cope all manner of crimes and injustices that are threatening and affecting our society today.

The participants, while at workshop held at Crispan Hotel Zarmaganda Jos, Thursday, unanimously called on RULAAC to step down this awareness to local government areas across the country because it will go a long way in addressing some of the issues that have to do with distrust and injustice and it was marvelous.

Although, the sitting arrangement earlier really depicted how separate they tend to misunderstand themselves while carrying out their respective duties because the Police were seen sitting on one side, the Journalists on the other and the CSOs were seen in the middle, but in the course of interactions they were systematically reshuffled by Chairman of the occasion and it really brought to table the needed understanding.

Kudos to Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (RULAAC) for carefully selecting these key participants to be part of the inauguration of the Police Stakeholders Partnership Accountability Forum (PSPAF) and Capacity Building for Human Rights Monitors in Plateau State, making the floor opened for them to express and bring out grey areas that affect their respective duties.

Apart from the inauguration of PSPAF, RULAAC with support from Open Security Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) organised

all participants to come together and work towards charting a new course, describing the meeting as a gap analysis to understanding each other.

On his part, the Convener and Executive Director of RULAAC, Mr. Okechukwu Nwanguma, said, "the general objective of this project is to facilitate the coordination and projection of the voices of communities affected by insecurity and to promote their involvement in designing and implementing workable solutions to insecurity in their communities."



RULAAC organises stakeholders workshop on partnership



Commissioner of Police in a group photograph with organizers and resource persons

training for Human Rights Monitors on Human Rights Monitoring Report Writing it was graced by the State Commissioner of Police, CP Batholomew Onyeka, with three of his Divisional Police Officers from Nasarawa Gwong, Rantya and Anglo Jos Divisions in attendance.

Declaring the event opened, the Plateau State Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice,

"As we informed you in your various invitation letters, RULAAC, in partnership with the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), is implementing "Community Access to Justice and Criminal Justice Interactive Project" to enhance access to justice to the poor and most vulnerable groups who are unequally and disproportionately affected by a dysfunctional criminal justice system", he

the State Coordinator, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Ms. Grace Pam, thanked RULAAC for choosing Plateau State for the workshop to come and listen to each other and understand the challenges in our communities.

She commended the DPO of Nasarawa Gwong, CSP Hassan Musa and his counterparts from Rantya and Anglo Jos Divisions from the wonderful work they

the commitment of all actors within the process will undoubtedly influence the extent of success we can record against the criminals.

"We should avoid ethnic profiling and colouration of situations as crime is not defined by ethnic background but by individual's disposition and intents. Hence, we should appreciate that a crime is a threat to all groups and could be perpetrated by any individual



Cross section of participants comprising SP Ayuba and CSP Musa Hassan of Rantya and Nassarawa Gwong Division

Barrister Chrisantus, commended RULAAC and NHRC for organising such an awakening programme and that, the administration of Criminal Justice affects economy of every society, hence the need for people to access justice because it was very key to the development of every society.

Earlier, the Chairman of the occasion commended the state Commissioner of Police for deeming it fit to attend in person and that, it was an indication of how serious he has been to issues affecting the citizens and urged

enthusied. While commending the Plateau State Coordinator, NHRC, Ms. Grace Pam, who was one of the resource persons, prayed and hoped that the event would mark the beginning of a mutually rewarding relationship, mutual understanding and partnership between the Plateau State Police and CSOs, Journalists and all the communities it serves.

Presenting the Paper titled: "Role of Civil Society Organisations in Human Rights Monitoring, Reporting, Documentation and Advocacy",

were doing, urging Civil Society Organisations to create a Monitoring Desk as a Department in their respective organisations so that, information flow and monitoring would be effective.

Meanwhile, the Plateau State Commissioner of Police, Batholomew Onyeka, appreciated specially the Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (RULAAC) for sharing in the Police reform vision of the Inspector General of Police, IGP Usman Alkali Baba, particularly in Community Policing saying, "the strength of this partnership and

or group. A key factor is that we should as a people, be determined to build a consensus and partner in condemning any act of criminality and resolving to work with the Police towards identifying, isolating and bringing the criminal elements within our communities to deserve justice regardless of their status, background, or gender", he encouraged. It is our prayer that this synergy would bring better understanding to their various roles in our society. God bless Nigeria!

IMAGES

PLATEAU AT 47 AND FORGIVENESS DAY 2023

The celebration of Plateau State at 47 and the annual Forgiveness Day 2023 took place yesterday at the Rwang Pam Township Stadium, Jos



Governor Lalong (left) putting heads together with His Eminence Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji, Dr. Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar



Governor Lalong with other invited dignitaries displaying the Gazette on the creation of Districts and Chiefdoms



from left are, Rev. Prof. Pandang Yamsat of Plateau Inter-Religious Council, Sheikh Ghazali Adam, Deputy Chief Imam of Jos Central Mosque, Hon. Benschak Dalop and Hon. Sadat Garga



Emir of Kano, Alhaji Aminu Ado Bayero on behalf of Governor Lalong (left) presenting certificate to the Dagwom Rwey, Jos South, HRH (Dr) Nga Dangyang



From left are, Chief Judge, Justice David Mann, Deputy Governor, Prof. Sonni Gwanle Tyoden, Sir Fidelis Taggun, SGS, Prof. Danladi Abok Atu and others



Archbishop of Jos Catholic Diocese, Rev. Dr. Matthew Ishaya Audu presenting certificate to the traditional ruler of Zawan, HRH Da (Sir) Christopher Mancha



Emir of Kano, Alhaji Aminu Ado Bayero, Emir of Askira, HRH Alhaji Mai Abdullahi Muhammadu Ibn Askirama and His Majesty, Da Jacob Gyang Buba CFR, Gbong Gwom Jos



Sir. Fidelis Taggun, former Governor of Plateau State (left) handing over Faith Based Schools to original owners (Islamiya Schools)

PHOTOS: DANLADI DUK

Odd World

Cowboy hat house goes up for rent

AN eco-friendly house with its roof shaped like a cowboy hat in Huntsville, Texas, America, has gone up for rent on property site Zillow for \$900 (£750) per month

An eco-home that looks like it belongs on the set of a western movie as its entire roof is in the shape of a cowboy hat has gone up for rent. The two-bed property, appropriately called The Hat House, caught the attention of social media users after images of its striking Stetson-shaped roof, which also serves as a balcony, emerged online.

Heart of Texas Real Estate posted the snaps on property site Zillow, showcasing the rental's 'story book charm' and rustic interior salvaged from discarded materials destined for landfill. The 660 sqft house, in Huntsville, Texas, US, was designed in 2017 by Texan-born builder Dan Philips, and built using recycled wood and cement plaster stucco.

Described as a tribute to Texas' Ranch culture, the \$900 (£750) per month property is located on a highway opposite a famous Texan steakhouse and next to another of Philips' works - a cowboy boot-shaped home.

Many thrilled country and western fans declared the property's designer a visionary, while others weren't so complimentary, describing it as "the ugliest disaster I've seen".

A third added: 'Truly the world's most unusual house, I had NO idea what to expect and am still shocked'.

Principal Broker for Heart of Texas Real Estate, Theresa Frazier, described how the property largely appeals to artistic househunters- and that they were looking for a "special" person to lease it.

Theresa said: "It's really adorable. There's a cowboy hat house and a boot house and they're both right beside each other on the street.

"It's a very interesting property. It

seems to appeal to artsy people, students and younger folk in the art department.

"Your conventional furniture doesn't actually fit in there real well, it takes a little bit of creativity to re-arrange furniture in there. It's pretty neat.

"It's cute and quirky. When it was first built we had loads of people come to see it open.

"People are usually really interested, they want to see the oddity of the type of property it is.

"There's a lot of interest, but it will take a special type of person to want to lease it.

"Dan Philips used discarded materials that were overflowing the landfills. It was all salvageable materials and this was a good way for him to use it.

"It's wonderful, it exemplifies the spirit of Texas. People enjoy driving by and taking a look at it."

The property was shared online with the caption: "Is this Texas enough for y'all?"

One commenter replied: "Say what you will [but] the guy was a visionary, and talented.

"Not being most people[']s style obviously, but every piece was well thought out. A lot of work and imagination went into those."

Another wrote: "This has to be the ugliest disaster I've seen on this site. Gah. I can't un-see this mess."

One commented: "My eyes. There is a lot going on it that little space... interesting though."

Another wrote: "This is a good deal on a rental in a college town. Wow. Weird house though."

One commented: "I hate how so many on here resort to ugly criticism and judgement, just because something doesn't fit with their taste, or the "influencers" they follow so religiously."

Source: The Mirror



Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani...

DEAR God, I am pained to the extent that I cannot stop tears following freely down my cheek each night my family is about going to bed. The glaring scenario of socio-economic retardation and political uncertainty have both cobwebbed my thoughts of hoping for a better tomorrow for our nation. These past weeks have not been easy for me even as the wicked and their cohorts have risen to consume me, us and the Christendom. I cannot have a sound sleep because of the obvious fact that the gates of hell has risen and is prevailing against us.

As it is, the Nigerian nation state has almost lost its fundamental bearing even as many erudite scholars have submitted far-reaching evidences including pragmatic indicators that this time around; the hand writings on the wall are clear, the center can no longer hold. Many unspeakable and unimaginable things are happening in our communities which are almost puncturing our salvation in the Lord. A few days ago, football enthusiasts gathered at the Abuja National Stadium to witness the second crucial leg of the world cup qualifiers match between the Black Stars of Ghana and the Super Eagles of Nigeria. Many had gathered in full confidence that no Jupiter would stop Nigeria from going to the 2022 World Cup extravaganza in Qatar.

After securing a draw in Ghana during the first leg of the encounter in Kumasi, soccer pundits had given the ticket without any doubt to our Nigerian representatives. As it unfortunately turn out to be however, the Super Eagles failed to fly the nation's flag thus generating great concern amongst soccer faithful in the country. For yours sincerely however, I had concluded even before the match commenced that securing the world cup ticket was not that which Nigeria needed considering the battalions of problems before us. I thought that going to the World Cup tournament would make a further mockery of us as a struggling nation in most recent times.

Some of us are presently convinced beyond reasonable doubt that almost nothing tangible is working in the country. Just this past Sunday, another unprovoked attack took place in Rosu and Arri all in Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State where an unconfirmed number of innocent lives were killed. We cannot afford to also forget the unabated killings of innocent lives in Kaduna which is another unpleasant tale all together.

It looks as if these unabated security circumstances in both local government areas have defiled possible pragmatic solutions. But again, in the past few months, all tertiary institutions in this country have been under lock and key. Sad enough, all attempts aimed at settling the problems between the Federal Government and striking lecturers are still but a tremendous hallucination.

Many social commentators and experts are of the opinion that what we need at this particular crucial moment is for our students to get back to their classrooms to avoid spending more delayed excruciating years at their institutions of learning across the nation. Before now, the citizens of this country had the ample opportunity to select any means of

transportation to travel and see their loved ones or spend holidays in this country. Today, it is seemingly a different narrative as the citizens cannot move from point A to point B without any fear of molestation, kidnaping with ransom or instantly killed by hoodlums with impunity in the country.

From my humble assessment of unfolding developments in the country, I am in deep thoughts as to whether the unpalatable experiences of the war in Ukraine is but easier to comprehend and adapt too than the excruciating ugly developments in Nigeria. Just take a look at the most recent Kaduna-Abuja train attack and you will be ashamed as a Nigerian. Most annoying is the fact that despite the intelligence reports earlier issued by some security agencies, no one deemed it fit to investigate and or put in place any concrete preventive mechanism to this effect.

As if this was not enough, in broad daylight, terrorists invaded the Kaduna International Airport where planes were halted from embarking on their anticipated journeys to all parts of the country. As the situation is; these terrorists have proven that no journey either by air, rail, car and or our waterways is secured. This equally means that the citizens of this country are in serious trouble for no fault of theirs.

At this very moment, we all need a Nigeria where there is enough food for all, a nation where the laws of the land should be respected by both the rich and the poor. We certainly don't need a nation where its citizens would be living from hand to mouth. Regrettably today, more than half of the people of this nation cannot comfortably afford three square meals a day.

Even in the middle of this inflation heat, our leaders are still play tricks on us, painting a fallacious picture of economic stability which never is. Our leaders are no longer perturbed about the increasing number of killings which has overwhelmed this country. Lord, I just pray that our leaders with all sincerity of purpose and responsibility wake up from their slumber to comprehend the fact that our nation has crossed the red lines.

In more definitive terms, our leaders must begin to find lasting solutions to the issue of these unabated killings, kidnaping, insurgency, banditry or acts of sabotage including consistent cases of corruption and acts of personnel aggrandizement enveloping the country.

We as a nation must end this unpalatable dehumanizing inflation rate where the cost of living is already beyond the reach of the common man. Let's not pretend, we cannot continue to deceive ourselves that everything is on the right track in Nigeria when we equally know that things are in complete shambles.

Almighty God, this is not the kind of Nigeria we all anticipated for, this is not the kind of country we prayed for, a nation where we cannot sleep with our eyes closed due to the administrative ingenuity of our leaders aimed at tacking the security challenges bedeviling this country amongst others. I am wondering my Lord, Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani...

View Point

'God will take us to new levels'

By Dr. Isah Harry

THE might and strength of our essence in life is to acknowledge the Lord God Almighty through his Son, Jesus Christ of Nazareth and to serve Him. So, I first of all would want to wholeheartedly acknowledge our God Almighty through His Son Jesus Christ of Nazareth who has continued to bless us according to His riches in glory. Amen.

It is indeed a great privilege and honour to welcome you dearly on behalf of the Board of Trustees, the Pastorate, Elders and restored members of ACRC to our 5th Anniversary cum Thanksgiving, Praise, Worship and Donation towards the Church project, tagged "Shall I Come to God Empty Handed"? I believe this epoch making event is very significant knowing too well that God has continued to be with us right from the start till this very moment. Therefore, all honor and glory be to the risen king who has continued to take us from glory to glory.

Today's event is quite significant in our lives as a commission with the burden of actualizing the core mandate, mission and vision of the Commission/Church, as given to me by God. This year unmistakably vide by God's inspiration and the Holy Spirit gave me the Theme "Our Season of Manifestation" and a sub theme for January as "Our month of turning Point" This we shall achieve by holding every word of God in high esteem meticulously carrying out this mandate and expecting tangible result in our lives. You are



Dr. Isah

welcome to the month of January, 2023. God has demonstrated His faithfulness towards the commission in an unfathomable way. Amidst other awesome miracles and wonders, He has caused us to triumphantly cross-over into the New Year against the wish of the devil. Unto Him be all the glory and praise! That is why we must praise and thank God always.

The Spirit of God has strategically packaged a lot of life - restoration, teaching truth that will take our corporate lives and destinies to the next

level to unbelievably manifestation; Physically and spiritually.

Beloved, I want to believe that we all enjoyed the spiritual level with which the Lord has taken us into these past five years. The testimonies and the finger of God that we have enjoyed are more than enough to tell us of the Lord's goodness and faithfulness towards us in the Ark. For you to be in the ARK, you must be spiritually awakened, stabilized and focused. It is not gainsaying that today the body of Christ is desecrated by love of money,

power and fame. I am not deceived or carried away by the vibrancy of prayers or speaking in tongues but by sacrifice, righteousness and consecration. The days are evil. I am a man of Mantle not title. I don't carry titles around but through consecration, I work my Salvation and by genuine call, service and worship to God, I will lead the people to Christ, which is the ULTIMATE goal. I have challenged my members to be sensitive in the spirit and to know that they are genuinely called to serve. I am not looking for crowd but for people who will add value to the body of Christ.

We are a people of concentrated to the service of God without distraction: a commission/center of attraction and not diffraction and diversion. If you remain focus, as we are doing, and have faith, you will surely become a success in all ramification and manifest. The only reason the church is failing is due to lack of focus. Once a focus is broken, it means there is no more leadership, direction, no more target and no more spiritual fuel [Holy Ghost] to propel the church. We shall keep our focus in the ARK to become a success personified.

This is a time for stock taking, let us go back introspect, re-examine our lives. Let us strategize, plan, hypothesized and project asking ourself after 5 years, so what? What is the next line of action? Because God is ready if you are set, drop the weight and join the ARK. It is often said that when you fail to plan, you have planned to fail. Just as we need a permanent place of worship, that explains why we need to make plans to have a befitting House of God, our set up goal is SMART - specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time bound. It is evidently clear that the Lord has proposed to take us to a new level which you and I have never experienced before. The scripture says - "The path of a just man is a shining light that shines more and more unto perfect days. The Lord is ready and we are willing for Him to bear us upon His wings as we "Soar Higher". The price of greatness is exacting sacrifice, righteousness and consecration. That is not to say there are no storms or

challenges as can be seen in the write up, we frontally refused to get daunted and crushed by these challenges because of our focus on the Lord promises as encapsulated in our mandate.

Permit me to say, Our Guest Speaker is a true anointed son of God. My encounter with him was divine, without his Prophetic declaration upon my life, I would not have been in right standing with God. He remains my mentor. For him to agree to come to this little alter is a huge blessing to me in particular and the church at large. May the Lord Almighty bless him abundantly. As we live, hearing him speak, feeling, and touching his work is reassuring work in the Lord's vine yard; seeing, they say, is believing [except for faith which believes or and then sees]. We have maintained and shall always be a voracious for the word, unquenchable Fire of prayer and continuously engage in praise and worship of God.

Our spiritual temperature must always go up. Our language is restoration, hope, faith, gratitude, possibility, positivity and victory. Talking is proposing, but acting is achieving. Nothing makes nothing. Therefore, may you be stirred by the Holy Ghost to contribute meaningfully and sacrificially towards the MANDATE OF THE ARK.

Brethren, Please, as the elections are around the corner, I advice vote character and credibility, I urge you.

In conclusion, I wish to profoundly thank all of you for this great honour done us by your physical presence, prayers, material and financial contributions. You did it to God not Man and the Almighty God who sees in secret will reward you bountifully. Your physical victuals are important while your spiritual victuals [Salvation, baptism of the Holy Spirit, constant study of the word of God, prayers, holiness, faith, righteousness and sacrifice] are much more indispensable in this journey of life. Therefore, start preparing your victuals, our generation is waiting for manifestation.

God bless You.

Pst. Dr. Isah Harry is the General Overseer, Ark of Covenant Restoration Centre World-wide.



Pst. Dr. Isah and his wife Lydia



Lalong's condolence visit to family of Dan Suleiman

LAST week, when the sad news came that Plateau had lost its former Military Administrator Air Commodore Dan Suleiman to the Pangs of death, Plateau Governor visited the family the next day on February 2nd, 2023.

He led a delegation of key stakeholders from Plateau including Deputy Speaker House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Ahmed Idris Wase, Senator Nora Daduut, Member representing Plateau Southern Zone in the Senate, and Prof. Garba Sharubutu, Executive Secretary Agricultural Research Council Of Nigeria, amongst others for the visit to the family House located at Wuse 2, Abuja.

Lalong sent his condolences on behalf of Plateau People and told the family that as a father of the state, the loss was for Plateau because the state had lost its former leader.

He described his personal relationship with the late Dan Suleiman as very cordial and said despite their political differences, he would as a father always call to advise him on many state issues.

"In fact, he would always call to inform me anytime he is coming into the state for anything". The Governor said based on his advice for the Plateau project, he had plans to honour him and other former governors of the state during the 2023 Plateau Day celebrations/ Day of Forgiveness and reconciliation bilked to hold on February 7, 2023, when the tragic news of his demise was announced.



But Lalong said despite the sad incident,, which is inevitable, a family member will receive the award post humously.

"He was a father that was always giving me advice during my times of travails and I will greatly miss the role which he has played in my life".

"But God Knows best, I will be a part of the burial and there to pay my last respect and accompany the body of my late father to his final resting place".

Aside opening a condolence register in Abuja and Government House Jos, as a mark of honour, Governor Lalong informed the family that their father will be given a befitting state burial.

Spokesperson for the family and son of the late MILAD, Jim Dan Suleiman said the family were happy with the visit at their moment of grief.

"We are not surprised, we know how highly you held our father when he was alive. We will keep you informed of all the burial plans and arrangements and we thank God for how he has been using you to be a blessing to many people".

Until his demise, Dan Suleiman was Military Governor of Plateau State from March 1976 to July 1978 after it was created from part of the old Benue State.

He was one of the Founders of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and member of the General Murtala Mohammed's Supreme Military Council and he died at age 80.

The Late Military Governor also served as Federal Commissioner for special Duties in the General Yakubu Gowon Government and was regarded as one of those behind the setting up of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The Governor had earlier paid a similar visit to Nassarawa State Governor Engr. Abdullahi Sule who lost his son Alhaji Hassan Sule at age 36.

He went on the visit to Sule's country home at Gudi, Nassarawa State, alongside the Vice Presidential Candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Kashim Shettima.

But aside the condolence visits and his interstate travels and campaigns for the APC Presidential Candidates which he spearheads as Director General of the Presidential Campaign Council, the Governor last week on Friday February 3, 2023 attended the Campaign flag-off of House of Representatives Member representing Pankshin, Kanke, Kanam, Rt. Hon Yusuf Gagdi at the Pankshin Mini Stadium.

While MC Dan Angas, kanny wood musician Dan Zakin Kano, and other musicians and Artistes added colour to the event by displaying various performances and displays, Governor Lalong called on PKK constituents and stakeholders to vote Gagdi, a man he described as having a vision, and one who has set great records by touching the lives of his constituents with his numerous projects.

The Governor did a symbolic presentation of car keys purchased for campaigns to two out of the 20 beneficiaries.

News

NGO sensitizes youths on political participation

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

AHEAD of February 25th, 2023 general elections in Nigeria, a Nongovernmental Organisation (NGO), Lugard Youth Development and Empowerment Initiative, on Tuesday, embarked on sensitisation of Kogi youths to embrace effective participation in politics and promotion of electoral security.

The Executive Director of the organisation, Okwutepa Aminu Oseni in his welcome address during the one day workshop and town hall meeting held in Lokoja on Tuesday, described youths as the most vibrant citizens to entrench good governance in any given society.

"Also the youths forms the most essential instrument that could be used to promote election security when the need arises

"The workshop is targeted at achieving practical approach for youth political participation and engagement of new administration to promote representation of young

people in Kogi governance" Okwutepa disclosed.

The Resident Electoral Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in Kogi state, Dr. Hale Gabriel Longpet in his speech, hinted that INEC out of its fourteen mandate for the conduct of the 2023 elections in the state, have successfully carried out twelve of the activities.

The Resident Electoral Commissioner also use the forum to appeal for the complementary roles of the youths across the country to ensure the conduct of peaceful, free, fair and credible elections come February 25th, 2023.

He cautioned Nigeria Youths not to allow themselves to be used by politicians to cause violence, thuggery, intimidation as well as vote selling and buying.

Dr. Longpet equally enlightened the youths to embrace effective use of electoral materials and votting pattern as laid down by law in order to obtain acceptable and credible

results after casting votes.

"Elegible voters must endeavour to be patience while casting their votes to avoid the temptation of provoketion that could cause crisis" Resident Electoral Commissioner Appeals.

Mr. Hamza Aliyu of the INGRA, Civil Society Organisation in his presentation on "The New Electoral Act and INEC Guideline for the upcoming election" urged the youths to ensure that they abide by the rules of the game to avoid falling into the pitfalls.



From JIDAUNA YANUNG, Abuja

FG, World Bank unveil livestock development initiative

THE Federal Government in conjunction with the World Bank have unveiled a six year livestock development initiative, livestock productivity and resilience with aim of up scaling production and curbing farmers/herders crises.

Chief of Staff (COS) to the President, Professor Ibrahim Gambari while speaking at the inauguration of the project in Abuja stated that the project will address climate change as it affects animals breeding in the country. Gambari noted that President Muhammadu Buhari has invited all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Tertiary (FCT) to participate in the project.

He said the country has successfully carried out widespread vaccination of livestock against trans boundary illness which help project the nation's livestock sector.

According to the Chief of Staff, small animal tertiary clinics have been constructed in states across the geo-political zones of



Buhari

the country.

"The project would complement our efforts in the sector, as it is set to provide financing for explicitly mainstreaming climate change adaptation and mitigation objectives across all relevant policies and strategies, including the Livestock Master Plan (LMP) and the National Livestock Transformation (NLTP) and the National Agricultural

Transformation Innovation (NATIP)."

According to him, providing excellent legislative interventions is his desire. He further stated that his priority is to carry along the women, elderly and youths in policy formulations. "We would deepen social and economic interventions. I crave your support and prayers to achieve them", he said.

Sports



Doma United

Onigbinde wants VAR in NPFL after contentious ruling

DOMA United FC coach, Akinade Onigbinde, on Sunday called for the introduction of the Video Assistant Referee in the Nigeria Premier Football League.

Newsnow said that, he stated this in an interview with journalists after his team beat visiting Dakkada FC 1-0 at the Pantami Stadium, Gombe State.

Onigbinde, who lamented a possible goal that was not given by the referee, noted that VAR would have made the difference.

"That was a goal, it's time to call for VAR into our football. We were supposed to make

use of the advantage because the ball passed through the line; I saw the ball, it was a goal."

Speaking on unruly fans, the coach said, "On the issue of supporters club, we are going to talk to the management to talk to them and lecture them ahead of the next match."

Commenting on the win Onigbinde added, "This is waking up to prepare against our next match away against Wikki Tourists. It's a morale booster; we have three points at home, four in total so we move up. Our aim is to finish second or third on the table."

On his part, coach of Dakkada FC Danladi Umar,

lamented the hostility at the venue.

He said, "My boys did well, it just didn't go our way. However, we saw the little lapses and we will correct them and move on. The fans were very hostile."

Forward Ugoche Emmanuel, who made his debut in the NPFL scored the goal that gave his team all three points in the 59th minute.

"This is my debut in the NPFL, we looked for the goal and it came," Emmanuel said. "I feel very happy, my dream come through to play for the Nigeria Premier League. I wish to play on the continent, my mates are playing on the continent and they don't have two heads."

SUPER Eagles head coach Jose Peseiro has revealed that he is not against inviting young, talented players of Nigerian descent to play for the three-time African champions.

Newsnow said that, Peseiro has already handed Anglo-Nigerian full-back Bright Osayi-Samuel his Super Eagles debut in the international friendly with Portugal on the eve of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

Many more abound including Chelsea duo of Carney Chukwuemeka and Noni Madueke, Crystal Palace pair of Eberechi Eze and Michael Olise, Fulham centre-back Tosin Adarabioyo, and Arsenal striker Folarin Balogun, who is presently excelling on loan at Stade de Reims.

Peseiro admits it would be difficult forming a good Super Eagles team from so many talented players with Nigerian blood running in their veins.

But with a target of winning the next Africa Cup of Nations, the Portuguese tactician

Peseiro names two things he wants to see before inviting Chukwuemeka, Eze

confesses he will only consider working with those with elite quality and an unquestionable desire to play for Nigeria.

"There are many, many players at the moment that can play for Nigeria," Peseiro told the Mirror. "With that, it's not easy, our work."

"You receive some information or when you watch many players on TV or live, you can discover more players, more players, more players."

"I was in some matches when I was in England to see some players, then at the same time we discover, 'well that player can play for us, also', normally young players."

"There are many good players with quality, capacity and good training. For us, if we want to win the next AFCON, I am happy because I have many players with quality to create a good national team."

"But it's not easy to choose

the right players. We try to see them in the match, after that I try to call them for our practice and our friendly games because we want to create a small group with quality for developing in training and practice to implement our ideas to win the next AFCON.

"But there are a lot of players, and they need to show the maximum demand and motivation to play for Nigeria. Quality, of course, but demand and motivation to play for us."

William Troost-Ekong, Leon Balogun, Ola Aina, Tyrone Ebuehi, Maduka Okoye, Josh Maja, and Victor Moses are some of the players who chose to play for Nigeria when they were eligible to represent other countries.

Former Chelsea winger Victor Moses was a key member of the Super Eagles squad that lifted Nigeria's most recent Afcon Cup in 2013



Nigeria boast so many talented youngsters with dual nationalities in Europe and a couple of them could end up playing for the Super Eagles

Nketiah's late winner was a beautiful moment - Arteta

ARSENAL manager Mikel Arteta said it was a "beautiful moment" when Eddie Nketiah grabbed a dramatic late winner against

Manchester United.

The game looked like it was heading for a 2-2 draw after Lisandro Martinez equalised for Erik ten Hag's side.

But Nketiah - who also scored in the first half - netted in the 90th minute to keep the Gunners five points clear at the top of the Premier League.

"I really enjoyed it," Arteta told BBC Sport.

With the pressure on Arsenal following Manchester City's 3-0 victory over Wolverhampton Wanderers earlier on Sunday, Nketiah's winning goal from close range was met by rapturous scenes inside the Emirates Stadium.

Arteta added: "It was a beautiful moment at the end and we get going with our people behind us. It was beautiful."

They had to wait for confirmation they had secured all three points, however, following a video assistant referee check to determine whether Nketiah was onside.

Arteta admitted even he was not sure whether the crucial goal would be given.

"[The officials] were looking at something we hadn't seen and we very relieved," said the Spanish boss. "We got to celebrate twice."

Marcus Rashford gave the visitors the lead on 17 minutes with a sensational strike before Nketiah drew the home side level shortly after.

Bukayo Saka then put Arsenal ahead early in the second half, and while it seemed the points would be shared following Martinez's headed goal, Arteta felt confident his team had the mentality to succeed.

"They do surprise me with how they react," he said. "We encourage them to play free-flowing football and there is energy in the team and good things happen."

"To do it repeatedly against big teams, the way we played today, gives me a lot of positivity for the future."

"It is so tight now in the league, there are such small margins. Winning, losing or drawing, you have to be conscious of that."

"If we can capitalise on the energy, it will be positive."

As well as a five-point lead, Arsenal have a game in hand over Pep Guardiola's City, and have reached 50 points after playing 19 matches of the season - their best start to a top-flight campaign.

The two sides will do battle in the FA Cup next, when they meet in the fourth round on Friday.

Manchester United came to north London on the back of a 1-1 draw with Crystal Palace, a result that denied them their 10th successive victory.

Rashford's opener - his ninth goal in all competitions since the World Cup - was the dream start Ten Hag would have hoped for, but the United boss was disappointed with his team's lack of concentration.

"All the goals we conceded today are mistakes - it can't happen," the Dutchman told Sky Sports.

"Even last week, we were so hard to beat in such situations. Today we were not. All three goals, we could have avoided."

Ten Hag was without influential midfielder Casemiro for the game with Arsenal, as the Brazilian served a one-match suspension for picking up a fifth yellow card in midweek.

While he conceded that the Gunners are "good on the ball", Ten Hag said his side are a "good defending team" and should have done better against the league leaders.

"There were not a lot of open chances," he added. "We made mistakes which we cannot make. This game was decided by small details but also the decision making."

"That is hard to accept and we have to learn from it. I want to win. It is not good enough. We want to be the number one, but not if we make mistakes. That is clear and what I told them."

United are in fourth place, level on 39 points with third-placed Newcastle, and face Nottingham Forest away in the first leg of the Carabao Cup on Wednesday.

NPFL: Ogunbote Reiterates 3SC modest

Shooting Stars head Coach, Gbenga Ogunbote has stressed that the club has to simply do better than they currently do in terms of results.

Newsnow said that, 3SC are unbeaten, yet winless in the opening weeks of the new NPFL season. They have recorded consecutive draws in their first two games of the season, with the latest coming against Kwara United.

"We need to sit up because we are in an abridged league and we do not need any more mistakes," Ogunbote told Brila FM.

Gbenga Ogunbote reiterated his target for the season with the Oluyole Warriors and maintained that he wants to finish the season in an appreciable position.

"It was not a mind game, I just like to set realistic target, we have to look at the previous position of the club."

"The target that is being expressed to the public is not always the same worked internally, and it goes with the saying that if you aim beyond the sky when you fall, you fall among the stars, and that has always been a guide,"

the 3SC Coach said.

He also spoke about his style of football; something that is not always the case with many managers in the country.

Ogunbote noted that it is

important to entertain the fans who pay to watch.

"We need to satisfy the fans of the game, so if you want to do that you want to think of playing beautifully

and being successful at it.

"Although it has to do with the kind of resources at hand to make it a possibility, at the end of the day you work with what you have."



Ogunbote

Sports

Jos to host 1st cross country championship

As part of his long term plans to develop long distance running in Nigeria to world-class standard, the Minister of Youth and Sports Development, Sunday Dare, has disclosed that the first National Cross Country Championships to be organised by his ministry will hold on February 18 in Jos.

The championship, according to the Sports Minister, becomes necessary to enable the athletes to develop their strength and make them better runners.

"Cross country running, experts tell us is excellent for developing strength," says Dare who began the move to develop distance running in Nigeria last year.

"We have enormous potentials to rival the east Africans and win laurels for the country at continental and international championships and games. More importantly, we want to positively engage the mass of distance runners in this country and make them earn good living from running around the world like their east and north African counterparts," said the Minister.

Project Coordinator, Chief Tony Osheku shares in the minister's dream, insisting that Dare will be remembered as the first Sports Minister in over four decades who has taken positive and proactive interest in long distance running and runners.

He also explains why cross country is a necessary start for distance runners who want to succeed on the road or the track.

"I was a strong part of the team the Sports Minister assembled last year to map out



Sunday Dare

plans on how to develop long distance running in Nigeria and I remember we had a camp for a few weeks in Jos for some of our elite distance runners," said Osheku, a former Nigeria 1500m champion and one of the best brains when it comes to distance running in Nigeria.

"I cannot remember any Sports Minister who has shown the kind of interest and enthusiasm Chief Dare has shown and his

knowledge of the sport. It is amazing," observed Osheku.

Like the Sports Minister, Osheku stressed that training like a cross country runner or running in a cross country event will make an athlete faster, stronger and more in tune with his body and become mentally stronger.

The National Cross Country championship is a 10km event and will be held at the Rhino Golf course in the beautiful city of Jos.

First Abuja International Marathon to hold in April

THE inaugural edition of the Abuja International Marathon (AIM) will hold on 29 April organisers have announced.

The AIM is the only full marathon authorised by the Federal Capital Territory Authority (FCTA) with a route measured and calibrated by AIMS and approved by World Athletics.

In a statement signed by

the Race Director, Olukayode Thomas, the new date was arrived at after extensive consultations with all the relevant bodies in the industry from runners to sponsors, officials of FCTA, elite runners at home and abroad, and others.

Thomas said the decision to postpone the race from the original date was painful, "The management and staff of

Britain's former twice world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua will make his ring return in London on April 1 against American Jermaine Franklin, promoters Matchroom and DAZN said on Monday.

The fight at the O2 Arena will be the first time in nearly seven years that Joshua, 33, has fought without a world title at stake.

The Briton has not fought since his second straight loss to Ukraine's WBA, WBO, IBF and IBO champion Oleksandr Usyk in a title rematch in Saudi Arabia last August.

"Mentally and physically I feel ready," said Joshua, who has a new trainer in Derrick James for the fight against a 29-year-old opponent.

Franklin, who has a 21-1 record with 14 knockouts and whose first defeat was on points to Britain's Dillian Whyte at Wembley Arena last November, said Joshua had "had his time"

Joshua returns to face Franklin in April



Anthony Joshua Returns To Ring To Face Franklin In April

Curry ruled out indefinitely with knee injury

Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry has been ruled out indefinitely with a knee injury.

Curry limped off court during the third quarter of the Warriors' 119-113 win over the Dallas Mavericks after clashing knees with an opponent.

He had an MRI on Sunday which confirmed he had suffered "partial tears" to ligaments in his left knee, as well as bruising to his lower leg.

Curry, 34, will miss Monday's game against the Oklahoma City Thunder.

In a statement, the Warriors said "additional clarity on a potential timeline will be established in the coming days".

He could also miss out on a

ninth appearance in the NBA All-Star Game on 19 February, for which he had been voted in as a starter.

Four-time NBA champion Curry had already missed 11 games this season with a partially dislocated shoulder.

Meanwhile, the Brooklyn Nets have reportedly reached a deal to trade Kyrie Irving to the Dallas Mavericks.

The 30-year-old point guard had requested a trade after failing to agree a new contract, according to multiple reports.

Irving, selected as an NBA All-Star for an eighth time,

has endured a number of off-court issues during his time in Brooklyn.

His decision not to get the Covid-19 vaccine meant he could not play in the Nets' home games during the 2022-23 season. Chairman of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) Interim Management Committee (IMC), Gbenga Elegbeleye, has sent a message of goodwill to the 20 participating clubs and wishing them success in the 2022/23 season.

"As the remaining games of MatchDay One holds this weekend after the successful flag-off last Sunday, I wish to congratulate all the clubs as they start the season.

"I wish the clubs success as a team and the players, a great outing individually and collectively," Elegbeleye said in his message.

He assured the clubs that the IMC will be neutral but very firm in enforcing the rules adding that, "there will be a level playing field for every club as the IMC will not be favouring any club nor disadvantage any club".

The IMC chairman went on to urge the match officials to uphold the rules of the game by ensuring fairness to all at all times.

"I am appealing to the match officials to keep to the promise they made to the President of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), Alhaji Ibrahim Gusau and uphold the highest standards of officiating," the chairman noted.

He charged the clubs to educate and sensitise their fans on the need to maintain good conduct at match venues, warning that "the IMC has zero tolerance for fans disturbance and would apply the full weight of the regulations on any default".

The remaining nine fixtures of MatchDay One holds across approved venues this weekend.

2021-22 season until March because of New York's ban on unvaccinated people in indoor venues.

He would later say his decision not to get vaccinated cost him a four-year contract worth \$100m.

In November, Irving was suspended for eight games and had to apologise after posting a social media link to a film with anti-Semitic material.



The Abuja International Marathon is the only full marathon authorised by the Federal Capital Territory Authority

Unicentral Resources Generation Limited will like to use this opportunity to appreciate the general public and all the security agencies in particular for the decision to postpone the race because lives of everyone matters.

"Secondly, though we have put everything in place that will ensure we organize the first full international marathon and make it a memorable one, we prioritized the safety of human lives, so we had to postpone the race to April 29, 2023".

The Race Director thanked the runners and other stakeholders who called to empathise and expressed their confidence in the staff and management of Unicentral to organise a world-class race and also express their commitment to participate in the race whenever a new date is announced. "We appreciate your support and understanding",

Thomas said the 29 April 2023 date is cast in stone, "there will be three races on the day, we have the full marathon that is 42.195 km, the 10 km fun race, and the 5km race for students.

"Also, there are many lead-up activities to the race; they include the unveiling of the winner of the High School that participated in the production of the theme song for the Abuja International Marathon. The race will also be preceded by a week-long Marathon Expo with the theme- Celebrating the Best of FCT-, Other activities include but are not limited to the unveiling of the Marathon Logo, the unveiling of race ambassadors, and others.

Sports

Turkey earthquake: NFF provides heartwarming update

THE Nigeria Football Federation has provided a positive update regarding the contingent of the country's footballers plying their trade in earthquake-hit Turkey.

Playvolume00:00/03:40Vict or Osimhen is Napoli's most important playerTruvidfullScreen

According to the football body, all of Nigeria's football stars in Turkey are safe and away from harm's way following a powerful and deadly earthquake that struck the southern and central regions of the Asia-European nation.

In the early hours of February 6, 2023, a terrible earthquake hit a few cities in Turkey and neighbouring Syria causing the death of several people.

Many more people are believed to be trapped under rubbles following the collapse of about 6,217 buildings in ten provinces across Turkey.

Even more widespread damage has been recorded after what is said to be the deadliest earthquake to strike Turkey since the 1999 İzmit earthquake.

Several footballers have been reported missing following the tragedy, with Hatayspor Vice-President Mustafa Özat confirming that Ghanaian forward Cristian Atsu was caught under the rubble. Reports suggest, though, that he may have been found.

The Turkish Football Federation immediately postponed league and cup matches scheduled for Monday after the quake struck.

But worries abound regarding the health and safety of the many Nigerian players who play in numerous clubs in Turkey.

There are at least 22 players of Nigerian descent plying their trade in the Süper Lig, and 1. Lig – the country's first two tiers.

Top on the list of Nigerian stars in the Turkish top flight are Super Eagles captain Ahmed Musa and forward Leke James, both of who play for Sivasspor.

Nigerian international Henry Onyekuru and David Akintola are both at Adana Demirspor, while the duo of Jesse Sekidika and Olanrewaju Kayode only recently joined Ümraniyespor.

İstanbulspor is home to Michael Ologo and Emeka Eze, and there is the new Super Eagles defender, Bright Osayi-Samuel, at Fenerbahçe.

In a statement released on their official channels, the NFF sends prayers and well-wishes to those involved and those who lost loved ones in the catastrophe.

The body, however, assures that all of Nigeria's footballers in Turkey are not in any danger.

The statement reads: "The Nigeria Football Federation is sad about the unfortunate earthquake in Kahramanmaraş city of Turkey.

"NFF President, Alh. Ibrahim Gusau has reached out to Nigerian players based in Turkey, and they have all



Ahmed Musa not affected by the earthquake

confirmed that they are fine. We pray the souls of the departed rest in peace, even as we commiserate with the people of Turkey at this time."

Galatasaray are the runner-

away leaders with a nine-point advantage at the top of the league, but Bright Osayi-Samuel's Fenerbahçe will look to keep up the chase when hostilities resume.

Motsepe hails 'best ever CHAN' despite debate over value

CONFEDERATION of African Football (Caf) president, Patrice Motsepe has called the delayed 2022 African Nations championship (CHAN) the "best CHAN ever" even as debate rages on about the tournaments value.

Europe-based stars do not feature at CHAN, which means it is often seen as the poorer cousin of the Afcon. The CHAN was conceived by Caf and launched in 2009 to develop domestic leagues around the continent, with only home-based players allowed to compete.

The case for CHAN has also centred around it being a talent-spotting stage. This year, by the end of this edition more than 10 players had been signed by clubs outside their countries.

Morocco's Nayef Aguerd, Achraf Dari and Jawad El Yamiq who were part of the Atlas Lions' historic run to the semi-finals at the 2022 World Cup featured in their country's back-to-back CHAN wins helping them secure moves to Europe.

Other notable players that went on from CHAN to careers in Europe include Tottenham Hotspur's Mali midfielder Yves Bissouma (Mali), Leicester

City's Patson Daka (Zambia), RB Salzburg's Sekou Koita (Mali) and Braga's Al Motasim Al-Musrati (Libya).

But some have wondered whether the tournament would be more effective with an age limit, in this respect. This year's tournament had players as old as 36 taking part,

"It's better to play CHAN with players not more than 23-years-old because there's quality at that level and we don't need players who are 33 years of age," Tunisia legend Karim Haggui told BBC Sport Africa. Madagascar's third place finish on their debut appearance with a mix of youngsters and older players was a positive for Caf.

CHAN hosting hasn't always been the best in previous editions but the seventh edition hosted in Algeria, received positive reviews from fans and teams. The closing ceremony before the final had the pomp of an Afcon final itself.

Unsurprisingly, Caf president Motsepe was full of praise for the tournament.

"The quality of football on the field, the facilities, stadiums, pitches, VAR, hotels,

FOOTBALLER, Christian Atsu, has been pulled from the rubble of a building "with injuries" after the earthquakes in Turkey, his club's vice-president Mustafa Özat has told Turkish radio.

Atsu, who plays for Hatayspor, was trapped after the earthquakes that have killed at least 4,800 people.

The Ghanaian, 31, made 107 appearances for Newcastle, and also had spells with Chelsea, Everton and Bournemouth.

Hatayspor sporting director Taner Savut is still in the collapsed building.

Hatay was one of the areas closest to the epicentre of the earthquake, and has suffered extensive damage.

"Christian Atsu was removed from the wreckage with injuries," Özat told Turkish radio channel Radyo Gol.

"Unfortunately, our sporting director Taner

Atsu removed from wreckage with injuries after earthquake

Savut is still under the rubble.

"Hatay was deeply affected. We are coming towards the end of the most dangerous hours."

Atsu, who was capped 65 times by Ghana, joined Hatayspor in September 2022 after a season with Saudi Arabian team Al-Raed.

He scored the winning goal in the 90th minute of

Hatayspor's Super Lig match against Kasimpasa on Sunday.

The Ghanaian Football Association tweeted: "We've received some positive news that Christian Atsu has been successfully rescued from the rubble of the collapsed building and is receiving treatment. Let's continue to pray for Christian."



Atsu



Senegal are the first country to hold both Afcon and CHAN titles at the same time

transportation – it was the best," he said at a press briefing.

Senegal beat Algeria on penalties to be crowned champions for the first time. The West Africans are the first country to hold titles in the two tiers of continental national senior championships at the same time – Africa cup of nations (Afcon) and CHAN.

The country hopes winning the tournament, reserved for those playing in their national domestic leagues can help revive its local football

Difficult start The tournament began on a difficult note, with Morocco withdrawing and with the strong political comments of Nelson Mandela's grandson at the opening ceremony threatening to overshadow the tournament.

But there was much to be enthused about in the three weeks of football that followed. The tournament provided good football particularly in the knock-out stages and VAR was used sparingly without controversy.

The tournament was expanded from 16 teams to 18 to allow each of the six African zones to have three qualifying

slots. This new format came with its challenges. There were two groups of three teams, who only played two games at the group stage.

"It's difficult to keep the momentum going for the team when you have a break of eight days between the matches," said Mali coach Nouhoum Diame ahead of their defeat to Mauritania.

Mali's defeat resulted in a group-stage exit and saw Diame losing his job.

Near-empty stadiums at games where the hosts were not playing have been a familiar and unwanted sight at the CHAN and at the Afcon over the years.

Using four venues in the North of the country, Algeria delivered huge, enthusiastic crowds in the cities of Constantine and Annaba, plus reasonable turnouts in Oran.

Record attendance was witnessed in the capital Algiers where the national team played all but one of their

games. There was a strong sense that Algerian football fans were eager to showcase their country, with hopes of hosting the 2025 Afcon.

Rachid Oukali, the president of the organising committee of the CHAN confirmed that the Algerian government continues to invest in sporting infrastructure and that a potential 2025 Afcon in the country would include two new stadiums that will be unveiled in the coming months.

"Algeria is a football-mad country and the supporters have been asking to host the 2025 AFCON, so I hope Algeria will get the tournament," Oukali told BBC Sport Africa.

Algeria, South Africa, Zambia and a joint bid from Benin-Nigeria are seeking to replace Guinea, who were stripped of hosting rights because of concerns over infrastructure and facilities.

Iwobi hails Arsenal after Everton win

SUPER Eagles and Everton star Alex Iwobi proved he is still an Arsenal fan at heart, reports BSNSports.com.ng

The midfielder played for the Toffees against the Gunners in the Premier League on Saturday.

Iwobi and his side emerged with an upset win, defeating Arsenal 1-0 at Goodison Park through a James Tarkowski goal.

After the game, Iwobi posted on Instagram and Twitter to thank his former club.

He showcased pictures of himself training with Arsenal in the past, along with him embracing their manager Mikel Arteta.

After Everton's inspiring victory, Iwobi posted on social media, "Nice To See Some Old Faces, Even Better To Win!"

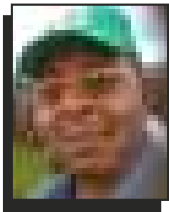


Iwobi hugs Arteta after the game

In addition, he wrote "Big respect!" alongside pictures of himself working out with Arsenal and hugging Arteta after Saturday's game.



Quest



writer

BALA TAKAYA, PhD

FRAGMENT

"For instance, why University of Jos, instead of J.D. Gomwalk University, Jos? Besides, has it ever occurred to the University of Jos that a J.D. Gomwalk Chair for Public Administration or Law needs to be established by the institution in commemoration of his initiative to establishing that university? Similarly, the Plateau State-Government in particular, ought to rename her nerve centre of governance, i.e. the Plateau State Secretariat, which he initiated and built, after him. It is not demanding too much to say that the Secretariat ought to bear his name."

BALA TAKAYA, PhD

Gomwalk's visionary imperatives: Egalitarian nationhood template

Continued from last week

The Mountains Shall be made Low

In every society, institutions that once served good purposes may grow obsolete yet untouchable as to view every change or innovation as unacceptable deviations from the norm, that must be blocked.

Similarly, some long serving individuals in public offices may appropriate so much of their official influence and see their public service positions as personal rights to act with impunity; even to the extent of becoming corrupt, nepotistic and paternalistic or partial to the detriment of good governance.

Even the machinery of central governance may grow so cumbersome and become so bureaucratically sluggish to the extent that procedural traditions become the end rather than the objectives of service to humanity for which they were set up in the first place.

Any of the above situations may constitute cogs in the wheels of progress and may constitute themselves into de factor oppositions to any new leader elected or appointed over them. Such situations require the messianic approach of drastic reforms or abolition altogether. In fact, that is the concept behind zero-based auditing of organizational structures.

The Valleys Shall be Raised

The aim of good governance is to provide conditions that engender a situation *Bright and Full Opportunities* to all citizens, such as by:

Establishment of full educational institutions and skill training centres for manpower development for all youth and trainable workers in all sectors of the economy

Grants of full scholarship facilities to the children of the poor or backward communities of the society irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or gender

Setting up a special agency for job creation strategies to absorb idle hands into productive engagements

Establishment of investment loan schemes and industrial incubation programmes to raise the entrepreneurial capacity of the economy

Making deliberate effort towards full political penetration through public education by establishing virile media organs of communication like the radio, television, print media and public



JD Gomwalk

forums and/or community viewing centres especially in poor rural areas

Inauguration of viable, sustainable and accountable poverty elimination loan schemes for various categories of promising citizens. This approach is sometimes referred to as *The Leveler* scheme as it aims at providing economic safety net for the poor and/or level grounds for the less privileged out-of-school youth in the society

Setting the Captives Free

Apart from ensuring human rights, social justice and *free and fair* political processes, a servant leader must also ensure basic freedoms from personal, physical and psychological challenges to the citizen, such as through the provision of free or affordable social services to ensure:

Freedom from diseases, Freedom from hunger, Freedom from environmental hazards, Freedom from exploitation of man by man, Freedom from ignorance and illiteracy, Freedom from poverty and Freedom from all forms of discrimination, etc.

Making the crooked Souls Straight

The elimination of impunity, high-handedness and political

criminality in public affairs is a *sine qua non* of successful leadership and good governance. When corruptions reeks and stink to high heavens in any society, it leads to public disaffection and fall of government. By whatever means the change of leadership is effected, even if by a military putsch, the succeeding government is usually welcomed with great enthusiasm and fanfare because it is seen as a breath of fresh air.

In the light of this, the most lasting memories of a good leader are usually about the first stable-cleaning reforms he makes, especially in his first three to six months in office. In fact a leader's popularity rating, in the minds of the citizen, tends to plummet after this period where he has not carried out any ground-breaking changes to the satisfaction of citizens.

We have, in the preceding pages, described some of the desirable characteristics on the **Template of Servant Leadership**. Do I hear someone ask "in contrast to what?" As highlighted earlier, the British foisted their foreign colonialism over Nigeria at the turn of the Twentieth Century. But they did worse than that. They also imposed on Nigeria a borrowed

administrative and leadership model that is hardly acceptable under any condition in their own (British) society. We have referred to it as the **Amirate Leadership Tradition**, simply put, the characteristic of that tradition is all that spell and define *Monarchical Dictatorship*. Etymologically, the model derives its name from the Arab word *Amr* to dictate, to command, to issue order or to authoritatively instruct. Dictatorship did not necessarily originate from Islam. Empires and kingdoms had practiced monarchical dictatorships long before the advent of the religion. Its adoption by the *Rashiddun* was only a matter of calculated greed for a good grip on the resultant Islamic empire.

The Amirate system is a long practiced administrative tradition since the territorial consolidation days of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad.

It is noteworthy here that Frederick Lugard justified his resolve to overthrow the Hausa-Fulani Emirates as a desire to reform away the corrupt and evil system of the Fulani administrative system^^. Yet, it was to this system that he reverted to run the colony of Nigeria after overthrowing the Fulani rulers. Three basic reasons may be adduced for this shameless *volte face*:

The pacification, control and administration of a vast territory the size of the then amalgamated Nigeria Colony required a great number of foreign staff, huge funding and a great amount of financial resources.

Colonialism was an economic adventure that needed to yield quick returns to the metropolis. The competition among European powers to secure colonial trading footholds in Africa notwithstanding, the Colonial Office in London could not see Lugard's adventure as a self-paying venture, let alone make substantial returns on investment into the colonial coffers. As such, Lugard was for some time left to his own devices as he was awkwardly hamstrung for funds; he was sent only some measly grants for his scheme.

Because colonialism is as much an imperial dictatorship as the Amirate model of governance, the British colonial powers realized that there was a natural

affinity between them and the Fulani dictatorship establishments they overthrew. Hence the resort to a *sybiotic* relationship with the Fulani by which the British "administered" the colony through the *indirect rule* system; leading to the resuscitation, strengthening and widening of the powers of the Fulani Emirate system and imposing them even on communities they never ever controlled before the British made them local agents of the colonial administration.

For instance, why University of Jos, instead of J.D. Gomwalk University, Jos? Besides, has it ever occurred to the University of Jos that a J.D. Gomwalk Chair for Public Administration or Law needs to be established by the institution in commemoration of his initiative to establishing that university? Similarly, the Plateau State-Government in particular, ought to rename her nerve centre of governance, i.e. the Plateau State Secretariat, which he initiated and built, after him. It is not demanding too much to say that the Secretariat ought to bear his name. For if the State cannot give due honors to its illustrious sons, especially one that paid the supreme sacrifice for her people's cause, no one from outside will find it expedient to do so. Finally, even if the sheep panic and scatter when the shepherd is struck down, they usually regroup. Similarly, it was high time the leadership elite of the defunct Benue-Plateau State regroup to strategize and lead sustained demands and reminders for the *posthumous delisting* of the name of this apparently innocent icon from any Federal Government records which designate him as a coup participant. There is a legal provision that allows the Chief Executive of Government to grant a *state pardon* to any convict he chooses to, no matter the gravity of the person's offence. This provision should be exploited for J.D. Gomwalk whose case more than deserves it.

Dr. Bala Takaya presented memorial lecture in an epoch making event held by the Comptroller General Nigeria Immigration Service, David Parrandang Foundation at the University of Jos.

Concluded