

Senate probes rejection of 19 constitution alteration bills

Page 2



Nigeria requires 20,000MW to drive economy, end epileptic power -MD Page 2

Obi files petition against Tinubu's victory Page 2

Military personnel flex muscles against journalists Page 11

THE Nigeria Standard



FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1972

VOL. 13 NO. 795

WEDNESDAY, March 22, 2023

N200

Email: nigeriastandarddailynewspaper@yahoo.com

Nigerian investors lose N16bn in stock market

Nigerian equities, yesterday, opened the week, extending its losing streak for the seventh consecutive session as investors' investment declined by N16 billion.

The All-Share Index (ASI) decreased by 29.35 absolute points, representing a dip of 0.05 per cent to close at 54,886.04 points. Similarly, the market capitalisation lost N16 billion to close at N29,900 trillion.

The downturn was impacted by losses recorded in medium and large capitalised stocks, amongst which are; Stanbic IBTC Holdings, Nigerian Breweries, Chemical & Allied Products (CAP), Multiverse Mining and Exploration and FCMB Group.

Looking ahead, United Capital Plc said: "we expect risk-on sentiments to return to the equities markets as the depressed interest rate environment will continue to favour the local bourse in line with our expectations for Q1, 2023.

Taking positions in stocks with solid valuations and dividend yields ahead of the dividend-paying season remains the choice strategy. However, we see room for extended profit-taking activities."

Meanwhile, market breadth, which is measured by market sentiment, was positive, as 19 stocks gained relative to 14 losers. Access Holdings recorded the highest

Continued from 2



Petrol price increased by 54.76% a litre in one year - NBS

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), says the average retail price of a litre of Petrol increased from N170.42 in February 2022 to N263.76 in February 2023.

It made the declaration in its Petrol Price Watch for February 2023 released in Abuja on Tuesday.

It stated that the February 2023 price of N263.76 represented a 54.76 per cent increase over the price of

N170.42 recorded in February 2022.

"Comparing the average price value with the previous month of January 2023, the average retail price increased by 24.58 per cent from N257.12.

"On states profiles analysis, Jigawa paid the highest average retail price of N329.17 per litre, followed by Rivers and Ebonyi at N323.33 and N317.14,

respectively.

"Conversely, Niger paid the lowest average retail prices of N198.50 per litre, followed by Plateau at N198.71 and Abuja at N200," it stated.

Analysis by zone showed that the Southeast recorded the highest average retail price in February 2023 at N306.86 per litre, while the North Central recorded the lowest at N215.01 per litre.

The NBS also stated in its

Diesel Price Watch Report for February 2023 that the average retail price was N836.91 per litre.

It explained that the February 2023 price of N836.91 per litre amounted to a 168.26 per cent increase over the N311.98 per litre paid in February 2022.

"On a month-on-month basis, the price increased by 0.98 per cent from the N828.82 per litre recorded in January 2023," it added.

On states profiles analysis, the report said the highest average price of diesel in February 2023 was recorded in Bauchi at N904.33 per litre, followed by Abuja at N885 per litre and Adamawa at N873.33 per litre.

On the other hand, the lowest price was recorded in Bayelsa at N767.14 per litre, followed by Katsina State at N778.75 per litre

and Edo at N789.43 per litre.

In addition, the analysis by zone showed that the North Central had the highest price at N850.65 per litre, while the South-South recorded the lowest price at N814.63 per litre. (NAN)



Kyari

NDLEA sends 6 convicted drug traffickers to 156yrs jail

The Federal High Court sitting in Lagos and Ogun state has sentenced six drug traffickers to a total of One Hundred and Fifty Six (156) years imprisonment for offences bordering on drug dealing, transportation, and conspiracy to transport illicit substances filed against them by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA.

Worse hit is a 27-year-old drug dealer, Ahmed

Abdulsabur who was arrested in 2022 by NDLEA operatives and prosecuted in charge number FHC/AB/20C/2022 at the Federal High Court, Abeokuta, presided over by Hon. Justice Joyce Obehi Abdulmalik.

Delivering her judgment on the six counts charge brought against Ahmed, Justice Abdulmalik convicted and sentenced him to 10 years imprisonment on each count,

bringing the total number of his in jail term to 60.

In a similar ruling, Justice Abdulmalik also sentenced another dealer, Olumide Elegbede, 32, to 20 years jail term; 10 years for each of the two counts charge brought against him in charge number: FHC/AB/128C/2I.

The judge ruled that the years of imprisonment in both cases will run concurrently.

At the Federal High Court in

Lagos, where the quartet of: Okechukwu Umeh; Lanre Adebayo; Adigun Adeshina and Emmanuel Omijeh were arraigned on three counts in charge number FHC/L/87c/2023, the trial judge, Justice Akintayo Aluko on Thursday 16th March convicted and sentenced each of them to five years on count one; seven years each on counts two and three.

Continued from 2

News

Nigerian investors lose N16bn in stock market

Cont'd from Page 1

price gain of 7.14 per cent to close at N9.00, per share. Cutix followed with a gain of 5.69 per cent to close at N2.23, while University Press appreciated by 5.53 per cent to close at N2.10, per share.

Custodian Investment went up by 5.17 per cent to close at N6.10, while Chams Holding Company appreciated by 4.17 per cent to close at 25 kobo, per share.

On the other hand, Ikeja Hotel led the losers' chart by 9.52 per cent to close at N1.14, per share. Wapic Insurance followed with a decline of 9.52 per cent to close at 38 kobo, while Stanbic IBTC Holdings went down by 8.52 to close at N36.50, per share.

Multiverse Mining and Exploration lost 5.80 per cent

to close at N3.25, while Livestock Feeds shed 5.50 per cent to close at N1.03, per share.

The total volume traded went up by 646.50 per cent to 1.172 billion units, valued at N2.877 billion, and exchanged in 3,066 deals.

Transactions in the shares of Neimeth Pharmaceutical topped the activity chart with 1.069 billion shares valued at N1.581 billion. United Bank for Africa (UBA) followed with 15.964 million shares worth N128.784 million, while Access Holdings traded 13.033 million shares valued at N114.365 million.

Transnational Corporation (Transcorp) traded 11.770 million shares valued at N15.257 million, while Zenith Bank transacted 9.861 million shares worth N243.759 million.

Cont'd from Page 1

A statement by Femi Babafemi, Spokesman of NDLEA said, "This brings the total number of years for each of them to 19 years jail term and the four of them to 76 years imprisonment".

While the judge ruled that the sentences should run concurrently, he also gave the four convicts the option of paying N20 million in lieu of the jail terms.

This is in addition to granting the application by the NDLEA for the final forfeiture of a white colour Ford bus with registration number: PHC 315 ZT, used in conveying 532.8 kilograms of Loud variant of cannabis on the day of their arrest, Sunday 22nd January 2023 along Lagos/ Ibadan expressway.

The court also granted the final forfeiture of Three Million Naira (N3, 000, 000) offered as bribe by the convicts to NDLEA officers.

NDLEA sends 6 convicted drug traffickers to 156yrs jail

The drugs concealed with 'take away' food packs in 19 big cartons were seized in the white Ford bus heading to Port Harcourt, Rivers state along Lagos-Ibadan expressway at

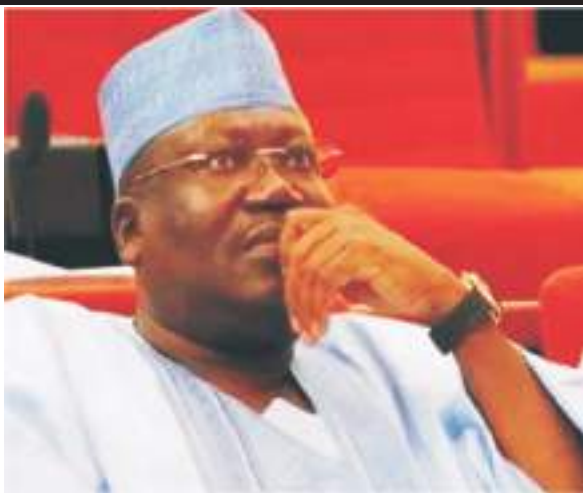
2:35am on Sunday 22nd Jan.

The convicts: Okechukwu Umen, 41; Lanre Adebayo Ismaila, 47; Adeshina Adigun Fatai, 50; and

Emmanuel Omijeh, 42, were arrested in connection with the seizure and three million naira (N3,000,000) offered as bribe kept as part of the exhibits for their prosecution.



Senate probes rejection of 19 constitution alteration bills



Lawan

The Senate on Tuesday said it has constituted a committee to probe why President Muhammadu Buhari did not

assent to 19 out of the 35 constitution review bills transmitted to him by the National Assembly.

The Senate President, Ahmad Lawan, made this assertion in his remarks during resumption of plenary after the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly election.

President Buhari had last week signed into law 16 constitution amendment bills out of the 35 bills transmitted to him by the ninth National Assembly.

Lawan commended President Buhari for assenting to 16 constitution amendment bills, particularly the bills to guarantee the independence of state legislatures and the judiciary.

He, however, said the Upper chamber will engage with the Presidency to understand why the remaining 19 bills were not assented to.

Obi files petition against Tinubu's victory

The presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi, has filed his petition challenging the victory of Bola Tinubu as Nigeria's president-elect in the 25 February election.

Mr Obi, who came third in the election, filed his petition at the Presidential Election Petition Court in Abuja, at about midnight on Tuesday.

The Labour Party candidate sought five prayers in his petition.

Principal among his prayers is his call on the court to cancel the 25 February presidential election and order a fresh poll.

The petition, jointly filed by Mr Obi and the Labour Party as co-petitioners, joined the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Mr Tinubu, Shettima Kashim (vice president-elect), and the All Progressives Congress (APC) as the respondents.

Tuesday, being the 21st day after the declaration of the results of the election on 1 March, is the last day he any other aggrieved candidates and political parties had to file their petition in court.

Tuesday, being the 21st

day since the declaration of the results of the election on 1 March, is the last day he as well as any other aggrieved candidates and political parties have to file their petition in court.

INEC Chairman, Mahmood Yakubu, who announced the final results in the early hours of 1 March in Abuja, said Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) came second in the election.

Atiku polled a total of 6,984,520 votes in the election.

Mr Obi of the Labour Party came third in the election with a total of 6,101,533 votes, while Rabiu Kwankwaso of the NNPP came fourth with 1,496,687 votes.

Setting out the grounds for the petition, Mr Obi's lead lawyer, Livy Ozoukwu, said Mr Tinubu "at the time of the (presidential) election was not qualified to contest the election."

Mr Ozoukwu, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), argued that the president-elect "was not duly elected by majority of the lawful votes cast at the time of the election."

The senior lawyer led Atiku's legal team when the

former vice president unsuccessfully challenged the victory of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2019.

Among his five prayers, Mr Obi urged the Presidential Election Petition Court to "determine that at the time of the presidential election held on 25 February, 2023," Messrs Tinubu and Shettima "were not qualified to contest the election."

He prayed the tribunal "to determine that all the votes recorded for" Mr Tinubu "in the election are wasted votes, owing to the non-qualification" of the president-elect and Mr Shettima.



Obi

The Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer (CEO), of Transcorp Power Limited, Mr Christopher Ezeafulukwe, has harped on the need for conscious and disciplined investment efforts by the next administration in the country in addressing certain challenges in the power sector in the country.

He said that the country requires at least 20,000 Megawatts of electricity to drive its industrial, economic and social activities round the clock and end epileptic power supply in Nigeria.

Ezeafulukwe stated this while addressing newsmen at the company's plant in Ughelli after a guarded study tour of facilities in the plant by a delegation from the Army War College of Nigeria as part of their environmental study tour.

The theme of the tour,

That it be determined that the 2nd Respondent (Mr Tinubu) having failed to score one-quarter of the votes cast at the Presidential Election in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, was not entitled to be declared and returned as the winner of the presidential election held on 25 February, 2023."

Mr Obi prayed the tribunal to make "an order cancelling the election and compelling the 1st respondent (INEC) to conduct a fresh election at which the 2nd Respondent (Tinubu), 3rd respondent (Shettima) and 4th respondent (APC) shall not participate."

Nigeria requires 20,000MW to drive economy, end epileptic power -MD

"Protection of Critical National Assets and Infrastructure for National Defence", he noted, was laudable, he noted, adding that the aim of the visit would equip them in assisting the company in vital areas such as "surveillance and intelligence gathering for security of the company's facilities."

On the objective of the study tour, the Transcorp Power chief executive said, "The security agencies came to know our needs in areas of strategic alliance with them in order to safeguard our property and facilities as well as certain security issues challenges and how we have been dealing with them", he said of the study tour by the military personnel.

Ezeafulukwe stressed the need to decisively tackle the current epileptic power supply in the country Nigeria stating that, noting that it was distressing for a country of over 200 million people to be grappling still with driving its economic and social activities with a meagre 5,000 MW of electricity.

He said that deliberate and significant improvement in generation, transmission and distribution of electricity was invaluable towards finding lasting solution to the headache of inadequate power supply in the country.

He bemoaned the heavy cost implications of servicing turbines as such services are not available within the country vis-a-vis sourcing overseas components of the required items in hard currency.

Ezeafulukwe said, "For instance, to carry out routine inspection of the turbines, you need to fly them out which is a huge foreign expenditure which exposes us to logistic

challenges.

The Transcorp Power MD, who bemoaned Nigeria's overdependence on technical services from abroad, said that the situation on ground was bound to increasingly expose gas plants in the country to the vagaries of logistics changes because "we queue to wait for some clearance before being allowed to do our jobs, which to a large extent affected our turnaround. That is, if you have a turbine that would have come back in six months, it then takes some eight to 10 months."

"This also denied us running the turbine from generating power that you would have put on the National Grid to support the nation's economy.

However, he urged the Federal Government to work on incentives for investors in the power sectors by identifying gas fields for accelerated development.

He, nevertheless, scored the company high on provision of various corporate social responsibility programmes spanning quality education and vocational training and empowerment to provision of health and other social facilities particularly for several host communities in Ughelli North and Ughelli South local government areas.

Earlier in an address, the Deputy Commandant/Director of Studies at the War College, Brigadier-General U.M. Alkali, noted that the study tour was of strategic importance towards identifying and understanding ways and means of safeguarding various critical infrastructure in the country important to national economic growth.

He assured that the outcome of the detailed study tour will help in fashioning policies and programmes that would translate into ensuring seamless operational activities of critical assets like Transcorp Power.



Taking agriculture to new technological heighties

Agriculture in Nigeria has an interesting history. A history of ups and downs. Long before the discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantity, from the precolonial and colonial days to the First Republic, agriculture was the mainstay of the economy.

By **ABDULRAHMAN ABDULRAHEEM**

BUT when the Black Gold came along, successive leaders misplaced the nation's priorities and progressively abandoned agriculture, textiles, mining, and other vibrant sectors that gave the country a competitive advantage over other countries.

Despite many years of neglect, agriculture has managed to hold its own in the scheme of things. It remains the biggest employer of labour in the country. Over 70 per cent of Nigerians engage in the agriculture sector, though mainly at a subsistence level. The subsistence part of it needs to be addressed, and the present administration has done a couple of things in that regard.

The contribution of the sector to the GDP is, however, impressive. Between January and March 2021, agriculture contributed to 22.35 per cent of the total GDP.

Nigeria has 70.8 million hectares of agriculture land area with maize, cassava, guinea corn, yam, beans, millet, and rice being the major crops. Nigeria accounts for over 70% of yams produced globally.

Nigeria's rice production rose from 3.7 million metric tons in 2017 to 4.0 million metric tons in 2018. In spite of this, only 57 per cent of the 6.7 million metric tons of rice consumed in Nigeria annually is locally produced leading to a deficit of about 3 million metric tons, which is either imported or smuggled into the country illegally. To stimulate local production, the government banned importation of rice in 2019.

As for cassava, Nigeria produced 59 million tons in 2017, making it the world's largest producer (approximately 20 per cent of global production). The economic potential is enormous, with high revenue yields from both domestic value addition and derived income as well as revenues for the government. With improved varieties and production techniques, production is anticipated to increase.

Animal production has remained underexploited. Livestock mostly reared by farm families are the small ruminants like goats (76 million), sheep (43.4 million), and cattle (18.4 million). The ecology in the northern part of the country makes it famous for livestock keeping. In addition to small and large ruminants, the poultry population stands at 180 million, according to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Domestic demand, however, outweighs production despite several interventions by development partners to improve production and safeguard against diseases, including transboundary animal diseases.

Nigeria is the largest fish consumer in Africa and among the largest fish consumers in the world, with about 3.2 million metric tons of fish consumed annually. Its fisheries and aquaculture are among the fastest growing subsectors in the country. With a coastline of 853km and over 14 million hectares of inland waters, total fish production per year is close to 1 million metric tons (313,231 metric tons from aquaculture and 759,828 metric tons from fisheries). Fishing is a vital livelihood for the poor as well as an



important protein source at the household level. The aquaculture sub-sector is considered a very viable alternative to meeting the nation's need for self-sufficiency in fish production and nutritional needs.

Despite the contribution to the economy, Nigeria's agricultural sector faces many challenges that impact its productivity. These include poor land tenure systems, low levels of irrigation farming, climate change, and land degradation.

Others are low technology, high production cost and poor distribution of inputs, limited financing, high post-harvest losses, and poor access to markets.

These challenges have stifled agricultural productivity affecting the sector's contribution to the country's GDP as well as increased food imports due to population rise, hence declining levels of food sufficiency.

For instance, between 2016 and 2019 Nigeria's cumulative agricultural imports stood at N3.35 trillion, four times higher than the agricultural export of N803 billion within the same period.

The government has implemented several initiatives and programmes to address the situation including the Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP), Nigeria-Africa Trade and Investment Promotion Programme, Presidential Economic Diversification Initiative, Economic and Export Promotion Incentives and the Zero Reject Initiative, Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+); Nigeria Erosion and Watershed Management Project (NEWMAP); Action Against Desertification (AAD) Programme, among others.

All these efforts aim to increase agricultural productivity in order to provide sufficient quantities of food to meet domestic demand as well as an abundance of commodity crops for export in the international market. Besides, they aim at reversing forest loss and degradation; promoting sustainable management of natural

resources; rehabilitation of degraded lands, and reducing erosion and climate vulnerability.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the potential is there even though the challenges are enormous.

The experience is available in Nigeria, and the expertise is in abundance. Even government policies have been favourable as in recent years, the emphasis has been to diversify the country's revenue base, deemphasise oil and gas, and focus on agriculture.

But what about the technology to drive growth in the sector? What about innovations that will make the sector compete globally? What about ideas and vision that can make life easy for Nigerian farmers? What about robust and sustainable funding for farmers?

With the increasing population, estimated to reach 400 million by 2050, enhanced agriculture productivity through adaptation of new technologies and innovations is necessary to ensure food security and nutrition. Support from all partners to the efforts by the federal and state governments is central in achieving this goal.

e-Naira to the rescue

Talking about technology and innovations, the ongoing efforts by the the apex umbrella body for Agricultural Commodity Associations, the Federation of Agricultural Commodity Association of Nigeria (FACAN), to onboard 50 million members on the e-Naira platform couldn't have come at a better time.

FACAN said it has concluded a plan to register and onboard all its associations and members on the e-Naira platform in a strategic partnership with Araba Technologies Ltd (Arabatech).

The plan is a fallout from the recently concluded national meeting of the association's National Working Committee and

presidents of associations under its jurisdiction with the active participation of Arabatech and CBN representatives.

The National President of FACAN, Mr. Victor Iyama, noted that e-Naira will be of immense benefit to all the members of the Association in the long run down to the grassroots level since some members are traders, or processors, while most of the members are the farmers at the grassroots. He also charged the members present at the inauguration meeting to educate their folks at the grassroots.

The President was particularly happy about the CBN USSD (*997#) innovation, which means that without smartphones, BVN or NIN, farmers at the grassroots level can benefit fully from the e-Naira platform.

The plan is aimed at deepening the use of e-Naira among farmers and agro-allied merchants ecosystem in the agricultural sector of the economy. Arabatech entered into a strategic partnership with FACAN to commence the e-Naira campaign and onboarding of its 50 million members and associations across the country.

The National Working Committee and Presidents of Associations unanimously passed a resolution for the approval of FACAN e-Naira onboarding of members and therefore called for close collaboration with the CBN and Arabatech towards the successful implementation of the initiative within the timeline.

FACAN is an apex umbrella body for the Agricultural Commodity Associations in the country, and an initiative of the Federal Government established through a public-private partnership arrangement as a one-stop-shop between the government and the organised private sector in Agriculture and a link between the

private Agricultural Commodity Practitioners. The Association provides members with maximum benefits for the overall development of agricultural commodities in the country.

CBN had appointed Arabatech as one of the official Partner-Agents for the e-Naira wallet adoption and onboarding campaign in the country. The campaign is in furtherance of the CBN Digital Financial Inclusion Strategy and Programme, which is aimed at achieving inclusive adoption of Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) aka e-Naira across the county.

Launched in October 2021 by President Muhammadu Buhari, the e-Naira was introduced by the CBN governor, Godwin Emefiele, as a store of value and reliable medium of exchange. The e-Naira innovation was created to target the banked and unbanked merchants and individuals in the country in order to make transfers, buying and selling easier, cheaper, and less cumbersome.

And since the e-Naira was launched, the CBN has welcomed a lot of private initiatives meant to expand the platform to serve Nigerians better in areas like health care, agriculture, payment of bills etc.

When I started my e-Naira research, I was privileged to interact with the CBN's Head of Information Technology, Hajia Rakiya Muhammad. Also interacting with the Economic Confidential, she spoke glowingly about some of the private initiatives that are relevant to agriculture.

"So, this particular company came forward, they work with corporative societies like Agriculture, they give loans to small holder farmers. But often time when they give the loans, you know our people, they would use the loan to do something else, different from what they are meant for.

"So, when they heard about e-Naira, they said they would partner with us, you know, to curb malpractices and inefficiencies in the system. And I am happy to say that we have concluded the integration, and we will soon launch. What they do is you are a farmer, and the association gives you money, so they don't give you money in cash. They give you e-Naira.

"So, there is what they call input providers. Normally, the farmers will go to them to collect input and then they pay. Now, the input providers can only provide people on the scheme, and the farmers can only collect what they are supposed to collect, and then e-Naira charges it. So this is programmed, and they have concluded that."

Aside from aiding Nigeria's transition into a full cashless system, it is obvious that the e-Naira platform was created to fix all things and solve all problems. The wide-ranging opportunities the e-Naira platform provides are not what Nigerians can continue to ignore.

Abdulrahman Abdulraheem, Managing Editor Economic Confidential, writes from editor@economicconfidential.com



Business & Economy

Banks' borrowing drops to N453.7bn-CBN

BANKS' borrowings from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Standing Lending Facility (SLF) fell month-on-month (MoM) by 14 percent to N453.7 billion in February from N528.15 billion in January 2023.

Findings from the CBN's Financial Data for January and February 2023, however, showed that banks' deposits in the apex bank's Standing Deposit Facility, SDF, rose by same margin (14 percent) to N668.86 billion in February 2023 from N584.79 billion in January 2023.

The decline in banks' borrowings from the SLF reflects the current decline in money supply in the economy due to the various economic policies implemented since November 2022 to curb inflation and mop up cash in the economy.

The CBN Money and Credit data for January showed that Nigerians in response to the initial deadline to the CBN's redesigned Naira policy deposited N1.81 trillion into the banking system in January.

Consequently, Currency Outside Banks (CoB) fell MoM by 70 per cent to N788.9 billion in January 2023 from N2.6 trillion in December 2022.

Recently, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) consumer price inflation report for February showed that headline inflation rate rose 0.09 percentage



Emefiele

points to 21.91 percent in February 2023 from 21.82 percent in January, showing an acceleration of the headline index for the second month to a near seventeen and half-year high.

The witnessed acceleration according to analysts at Cowry Asset Management was partly a result of the persistent food shortages and the unprecedented naira scarcity witnessed during the month as an upshot of the central bank's redesigned Naira policy.

With the CBN's Monetary Policy Committee meeting this week to decide on various monetary and economic indicators in the face of unabating trend in inflation, they predicted further rise in inflation rate to 22.1 percent this month saying, "Across

the globe, rising inflation has continued to be a front burner in most economies, including Nigeria, and escalating the price stability plans far from the hands of the monetary authority; an economic growth trade-off that may further drive the central bank's position for an extended contractionary stance.

"At the next monetary policy committee meeting, we will opine for a hold stance from the committee following the slow rise in February inflation numbers against the backdrop of the gradual adoption of the cashless policy and limited currency in circulation. However, we project the headline inflation to be 22.1 percent in March 2023."

THE African International Trade & Commerce new report has identified Nigerian-grown ginger and shea butter as potential Geographical Indications (GIs) products, which could immensely contribute towards realising the federal government's diversification objectives.

The report titled, "Value Chain Analysis of Nigeria Ginger and Shea Butter as Potential Geographical Indications (GIs) Products under the Zero-Oil Plan of the Government of Nigeria," was released by the Africa International Trade and Commerce Research (AITCR) in partnership with Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC).

According to the study, both products have "significant market potential in various international markets, such as Europe, the United States, and Asia" and urged the federal government and relevant stakeholders to pay particular attention considering the enormous economic opportunities in the value-chains.

Speaking at the unveiling/validation workshop on market access and value-chain analysis for the products for non-oil Executive Director/Chief Executive, NEPC, Dr. Ezra Yakusak, commended the AITCR for the effort adding that the outcome would boost the diversification agenda of the federal government.

He said registering Nigeria's ginger and shea butter under the GIs system would safeguard

Ginger, shea butter will contribute to Nigeria revenue



Abubakar

these unique Nigerian traditional products against imitation and misuse as well as increase their value in international markets.

Specifically, the NEPC boss said the initiative would offer opportunities for smallholder farmers and rural communities engaged in producing these goods to access better prices and earn more income.

Represented by NEPC Deputy Director, Policy and Strategy Department, Mr. Ben Anani, Yakusak said the validation of the results marked the process towards creating a legal framework to provide legal protection to Nigeria GI

products to boost exports and promote the income and livelihoods of producers in the country.

However, in his presentation, Executive Director of AITCR, Mr. Sand Mba-Kalu, said the report provided valuable insights into the potential of Nigeria's ginger and shea butter as GI products.

He said the study would assist stakeholders in devising strategies to improve these products' value chains and market access, adding that AITCR remained committed to supporting the development of the products and promoting their export to international markets as part of the zero-oil plan.

Mobile sector contributes \$5.2 trillion to global economy-GSMA

THE Global System for Mobile telecommunications Association (GSMA) in 'The Mobile Economy Report' released recently, said the mobile sector also made a substantial contribution to the funding of the public sector, with around \$530 billion raised through taxes on the sector.

In 2022, mobile technologies and services generated five per cent of global GDP, a contribution that amounted to \$5.2 trillion of

economic value added. The greatest benefits came from productivity effects, which reached \$3.5 trillion, followed by mobile operators, which generated \$650 billion.

The biggest driver was services VAT, sales taxes and excise duties, which generated \$210 billion, followed by employment taxes and social security, which generated \$160 billion.

The GSMA, which represents the interest of over 400 operators across the globe, including Nigeria, added that mobile operators and the wider mobile ecosystem provided direct employment to around 16 million people across the world. In addition, it said the economic activity in the ecosystem generated 12 million jobs in other sectors, meaning that around 28 million jobs were directly or indirectly supported.

Toeing the growth trajectory, GSMA believes by 2025, mobile's contribution will reach \$5.6 trillion and by 2030 will exceed \$6 trillion as countries around the world increasingly benefit from the improvements in productivity and efficiency brought about by the increased take-up of mobile services.

Indeed, checks by The Guardian showed that data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) revealed that activities from the ICT sector contributed 16.22 per cent to Nigeria's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Q4, 2022.

According to NBS, the ICT sector is composed of four sub-sectors including telecommunications and information services; Publishing; Motion Picture; Sound Recording and Music production and Broadcasting. The Q4 2022 leaped by 0.87 per cent, when compared to 15.35 per cent recorded in Q3, 2022 and 1.01 per cent, when compared to the same period in 2021.

To the bureau, for 2022, ICT total contribution to the country's GDP was 16.51 per cent as against the 15.51 per cent of 2021. Further analysis showed that the ICT sector's real growth rate of 10.35 per cent, this was boosted by the activities in the telecommunications sub-sector, which added 13.35 per cent to the GDP in real terms.

Largely, the ICT sector contributed 10.42 per cent to the Nominal GDP in Q4, 2022, which was higher than the rate of 9.98 per cent recorded in the same quarter of 2021 and higher than the 9.58 per cent it contributed in the preceding quarter.

Speaking on the mobile industry's impact on the Sustainable Development Goals, GSMA noted that in 2016, the mobile industry became the first sector to commit to the 17 UN SDGs. It noted that each year since then, the GSMA has measured the impact of the mobile industry across all SDGs.

The telecoms body said the most recent analysis showed that the mobile industry increased its impact on all SDGs in 2021, with the average year-on-year increase accelerating compared with 2020, adding that the average SDG impact score across the 17 SDGs reached 53 (meaning the mobile industry is achieving 53 per cent of what it could potentially contribute to the SDGs), up from 49 in 2020 and 32 in 2015.

According to the GSMA, there are now 11 SDGs where mobile's contribution is over 50, compared to six SDGs in 2020 and none in 2015.

It said the mobile industry continues to achieve its highest impact on SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, driven by the reach of mobile networks and take-up of mobile Internet services.

GSMA noted that the biggest improvements were recorded in the industry's contribution to SDG 1: No Poverty; SDG 2: Zero Hunger and SDG 4: Quality Education. It said this was due to the increasing proportion of people using mobile for activities such as accessing government services, applying and searching for jobs, and obtaining educational information for themselves or their children.

The report also noted that there was also an improvement in the affordability of mobile data and devices. This comes after affordability worsened in 2020 because of the decline in per capita income due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Experts call for urgent solution to naira scarcity

SOME financial experts have urged the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to take urgent steps to address the perennial shortage of cash.

The experts spoke to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Monday in Abuja, against the backdrop of the 290th meeting of the MPC.

The meeting is scheduled to hold recently and Tuesday.

According to a financial expert, Mr Okechukwu Unegbu, the MPC should discuss the cash situation as a matter of priority.

Unegbu, a past president of the Chattered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN), said that the apex bank's claim of circulating more than N900 billion did not reflect on the Nigerian economy.

He, however, said that the problem would likely ameliorate as elections had been concluded in the country.

"Our biggest challenge presently is the cash

situation, and I think the committee should discuss it as a matter of urgency.

"The CBN says it has over N900 billion in the system, but it is not reflecting because cash is still scarce.

"But I believe that with the elections over, cash will start to circulate," he said.

He urged the committee to also address the "rumblings in the economy" in terms of inflation and exchange rates.

On the policy rates, Unegbu advised for retention of all existing parameters until the next meeting.

"I suspect that because of rising inflation, which is now 21.91 per cent, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the MPC may be tempted to raise the rates again.

"But my suggestion is that all the rates should be held constant to allow the MPC study the situation until its next meeting," he said.

Another financial expert, Mr Muktar Muhammed, urged the apex bank to explain to Nigerians the reasons why Naira notes were still scarce.

On policy expectations, Muktar said the MPC would have liked to increase the prevailing rates but could be discouraged by the already high inflation rate.

Ordinarily, we could see a hike in rates but as it stands now, because of the Naira shortage and what it has done to the economy, I do not think they will want to do that.

"Again, inflation is already high and I do not see how hiking rates, alongside the cash shortage will help the economy grow better," he said.

According to Uche Uwaleke, a Professor of Capital Market at the Nasarawa State University, Keffi, the use of cash scarcity to stifle demand is not a sustainable way to tackle inflation.

Uwaleke said that such a step could hurt economic growth and could lead to loss of jobs thereby, fuelling unemployment.

"Going forward, the CBN should ensure that measures are put in place to ease the cash crunch while gradually implementing its cashless policy.

Inflation rate rose from 21.82 per cent in January to 21.91 per cent in February, the economy witnessed a slight downward pressure in the general prices of commodities.

"This may not be unconnected with the cash scarcity which resulted in low demand for goods and services in view of the cash-based nature of the Nigerian economy.

"Recall that as a result of the cash scarcity and low demand, many traders who deal in perishable items were forced to sell them at below purchase price or cost of production due to lack of storage facilities," he said.

NAN recalls that at its last meeting in January, MPC increased the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) by 100 basis points from 16.5 per cent to 17.5 per cent.

It, however, retained the Asymmetric Corridor of +100/-700 basis points around the MPR, the Liquidity Ratio of 30 per cent and the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) of 32.5 per cent. (NAN



Business & Economy

Buhari, African leaders on agric financing

President Buhari advised other African leaders despite the failure of his government to improve funding for the Nigerian agricultural sector in line with the Maputo agreement. MARY IZUAKA writes.

ON 25 January, President Muhammadu Buhari urged African leaders to allocate 10 per cent of their national budgets to the agricultural sector in order to promote food security.

Mr Buhari also called on his counterparts to embrace innovative policies that ensure citizens eat what they produce and export the surplus.

He noted that feeding Africa is imperative and leaders must ensure that the people's welfare remains a priority.

"To succeed, we must strongly support farmers. There is no doubt that we need to subsidise our farmers, but we must do so in transparent ways, remove rent-seeking behaviour and effectively deliver support to farmers," Mr Buhari said in his goodwill message to the Feed Africa Summit of heads of state and government.

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

"As leaders, let us decisively ensure that we meet the 10 per cent allocation of our budgets to agriculture as agreed in the Malabo Declaration of the African Heads of State and Government. We must reduce the rate of rural to urban migration through the development of rural areas."

Nigeria's allocation to agriculture relative to total budget, under Buhari

Mr Buhari gave this advice despite the failure of his government to improve funding for the Nigerian agricultural sector in line with the Maputo agreement in the last seven years.

Maputo Declaration

The Maputo Declaration was an agreement struck during the second ordinary assembly of the African Union in July 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique, when African heads of state and government met to discuss food security and the development of the agriculture value chain on the continent.

Nigeria signed the agreement the next year.

In the declaration, the African Union (AU) made several important decisions regarding agriculture, but the most crucial among them was the commitment of the leaders to allocate at least 10 per cent of their countries' annual national budgets to agriculture towards



improving the growth of agricultural output by at least six per cent annually.

However, nearly two decades after the agreement was struck, Nigeria has failed to abide by the declaration.

Over the years, agriculture has remained a key driver for Nigeria's economy after crude oil. The sector contributes significantly to the country's development. In the fourth quarter of 2021, agriculture contributed 24.17 per cent to the nominal gross domestic product (GDP).

Although Nigeria has introduced a number of agricultural revival and poverty alleviation policies, it has consistently underfunded the sector, leaving the country at risk of food insufficiency and slow economic growth.

In 2020, PREMIUM TIMES reported how different administrations in Nigeria failed to invest substantially in the sector.

Available data reviewed by this newspaper showed that agriculture has grown at the weakest rate under Mr Buhari's administration than any other government since the return of democracy in 1999 while the sector received its best

financing in 2008 and 2009 during the Umaru Yar'adua administration.

President Muhammadu Buhari

In 2008, Mr Yar'adua's government budgeted N2.92 billion for agriculture, which was 5.41 per cent of the total budget, and in 2009, it budgeted N3.101 billion, which was 5.38 per cent of the total budget. In percentage terms, those allocations are the highest by any government to date.

Ironically, despite the current administration budgeting poorly for agriculture, the country has recorded its highest annual budget spending in history under Mr Buhari.

Under the administration, budgetary allocation for agriculture rose from 1.70 per cent in 2017 to 2.00 per cent in 2018, fell to 1.56 per cent in 2019, and 1.34 per cent in 2020, before recording a slight increase (1.37 per cent) in 2021.

In 2022, allocation to the sector represented just 1.8 per cent of the budget, the highest in four years.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, credit to the agricultural sector was 3.26 per cent and 3.36 per cent of

total credit to the private sector in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

When compared to the banking sector's credit to other industries, the agricultural sector received the lowest credit allocation from banks despite the sector's contribution to the GDP more than other industries, according to a PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) Presidential spokesperson, Garba Sheu, could not be reached to comment on this report.

Agriculture's contribution to Nigeria's economy Experts Speak

Speaking with PREMIUM TIMES, a senior economist with SPM Professionals, Paul Alaje, said the president's advice must be put into an actionable plan here in Nigeria before it could be taken seriously by other African leaders.

"President Buhari and his advice to the African leaders regarding allocating 10 per cent of their budget to agriculture is a laudable one. But people say charity begins at home.

"Talk is cheap, the ability to fulfil your promise is what matters. He is coming from a country where 70 per cent of budgetary allocation goes to recurrent expenditure.

"In fact, a significant

proportion of that 70 per cent is on debt service alone. President Buhari and his cabinet should understand how the economy should work. But unfortunately, I think what he is missing is the ability and understanding to make the economy really work," he said.

Mr Alaje said Nigerians are still suffering from food inflation and its impact on livelihood has been significant.

"What we still see is scarcity and high food inflation within the country. In the real sense, it is a commendable thing to have 10 per cent of budgetary allocation to agriculture and to have a planned agriculture sector but unfortunately, as we know in Nigeria, we still have huge issues around the agric sector," he said.

On his part, an agricultural communication expert, Obinna Chukwuezie, said although Nigeria ratified the Maputo protocol in 2004, it has done very little to ensure compliance.

"Sadly, Buhari in his eight years did not allocate anything close to 10 per cent to agriculture. How can he be asking others to comply with a protocol that he is not complying with? Sad. It is sheer hypocrisy," he said.

Politics

INEC happy with Bauchi governorship, assembly election

From **ABBAS GUNGURA, Bauchi**

THE Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) in Bauchi State, Alhaji Mohammed Nura, has commended the electorate for the peaceful conduct of the governorship and state assembly election in the state.

Nura who appreciated the electorate while briefing journalists after monitoring the election process in some Polling Units (PU) in Bauchi said it was peaceful and that the voters conducted themselves in all the polling units visited in Bauchi metropolis.

The REC who was represented by the Deputy Director, Voter Education, Mr Aliyu Shaba said he was satisfied with the voting process at the polling units.

"We went round to monitor with you journalists. We did not witness any challenges. The BVAS are working perfectly and everything is working smoothly till the end of the exercise.

"The voting commenced in most of the places, as early as 8:30 am. The election is peaceful; there is a large turnout of women and youths and the security presence is encouraging," he said.

Alhaji Ibrahim Gandi and Mallam Nasiru Sani, were voters at Bakin-Kura Women Center polling unit in Bauchi, commended INEC for a job well done adding that the presence of heavy security and the effectiveness of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) at polling



Yakubu

units made the exercise very easy and peaceful.

They explained that the extension of the election date from March 11 to March 18 provides enough time for INEC to configure the BVAS and plan better for hitch free election.

A Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Official in Bauchi, Bello Mohammed, said the election was generally peaceful and commendable as voters conducted themselves maturely waiting to make their choice of leaders.

Bello said their group members went round to monitor the conduct of the poll and reported that the election was peaceful, free of rancor and intimidation across the state.

Madam Jenet Paul, Domestic Observer said the election was so far peaceful in

all the polling units visited in Bauchi metropolis, and expressed hope that it will end the way and manner it started.

"I want to appreciate the election umpire and security for their doggedness and commitment to see that voting went peacefully and in good time.

"You can also see that many people have cast their votes and are patiently waiting for counting to start, while others are still voting", She said.

Adeleye-Ishaya wins Ijumu State Assembly seat

From **AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja**

THE Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has declared the All Progressives Congress,

From **WILLIE ATTAH, Gombe**

INCUMBENT Governor of Gombe State and APC flag bearer in the recent Governorship elections, Mohammad Inuwa Yahaya has been declared winner by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Inuwa beat his closest rival and PDP flag bearer in the race, Mohammed Jibrin Barde with 342,821 votes against Barde's 233,131 votes to clinch a second term in the Gombe State Government House.

Announcing the results, the Gombe State Collation Officer for the election, Prof. Maimuna Waziri, Vice Chancellor of the Federal University Gashua, said Inuwa won in nine out of the eleven Local Government Areas of the State.

The nine LGAs include, Gombe, Nafada, Funakaye, Kwami, Akko, Yamaltu/Deba, Balance, Shongom and Dukku. Mohammed Jibrin Barde won in Billiri and Kaltungo LGAs.

"Mohammad Inuwa Yahaya, having satisfied the requirements of the law has been declared

Gov Inuwa declared winner of Gombe Gov'ship polls



Yahaya

winner and returned elected", Prof. Maimuna declared.

In the other results, the NNPP candidate, Ahmed Khamisu Mailantarki came third with 19,861 while Keftin Amuga of the Labour Party polled 1,753 votes.

The Returning Officer also announced that

Gombe State had 1,575,794 registered voters with 618,231 accredited for the election.

However, valid votes during the election was 605,355 out of the 616,745 votes while 11,390 was recorded as rejected votes.

the transparency displayed as well as the voters for supporting the APC candidate to emerge victorious.

Also speaking, the Kogi State Commissioner for Environment, Chief Victor Omofaiye described the outcome as what APC stands for in Ijumu Local Government Area.

He congratulated the winner, the party and all stakeholders for working tirelessly to ensure the victory of Omotayo Adeleye-Ishaya.

APC, candidate, Omotayo Adeleye-Ishaya as the winner of the Ijumu State constituency of the House of Assembly in the recent election.

Adeleye-Ishaya is the first elected female Assembly member from the Constituency.

The Local Government Electoral Officer, Mrs. Grace Abalaka Haruna while declaring the result at the end of the collation exercise at the INEC Office, Iyara, said the APC

candidate having scored the valid votes of 8568, ahead of the African Democratic Party's Candidate, ADP, who got 3899 and the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, Candidate who scored 2648 emerged winner of the election.

Reacting to the victory, the Executive Chairman of Ijumu Local Government Area, Alhaji Taofiq Isah described it as victory for democracy.

He commended INEC for

PDP, APC, win Assembly seats in Kogi

From **AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja**

THE Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate for Ogori Magongo Local Government in Kogi State, Bode Ogumola, has been declared the winner of the House of

Assembly election held on Saturday in the state. The Independent National Electoral Commission's Returning Officer for the election, Mr. Ekundayo Mejebi, declared the results at the council's collating

centre at Magongo in the early hours of Sunday.

He said the PDP candidate polled 2,910 votes to defeat his closest rival, Major Akerejoka of the All Progressives Congress (APC) who recorded 2,162 votes.

Also, Seyi Bello of the All Progressives Congress (APC) was declared the winner of Kabba-Bunu State Constituency Election.

He polled 11,226 in the election which was described as peaceful by many observers.

Similarly, Jacob Olawumi of the All Progressive Congress (APC) has been elected to represent Mopa/Amuro for Kogi State House of Assembly.

Hon. Olawumi pulled 4,389 votes to win the keenly contested election.

Bello describes Gubernatorial, assembly election as seamless

From **MATHEW JWANTU, Minna**

GOVERNOR Abubakar Bello of Niger State has described the election process as seamless.

Bello along with his wife Dr. Amina Bello cast their ballot at the Mustapha Alkali Polling Unit, Kontagora.

He commended the electorate for turning out to exercise their franchise and said, "It has never been this easy in the previous elections. The process is very seamless; though the turnout is not too bad, electorate should vote peacefully," he said.

Also, member, representing Kontagora, Mariga, Mashegu, and

Wushishi Constituency, Abdullahi Garba commended the process.

Other voters including the Commissioner of Works Lafiya Sani, member I, Kontagora, Phalal Bako, and Sani Umar were impressed with the process and voters turn out as well as the general conduct of the electorates.

On the other hand, gubernatorial candidate of the People's Democratic Party PDP in Niger State Isah Liman Kantigi has expressed worries over inability of Independent National Electoral Commission INEC to properly name each of the boxes with candidate standing for election.

He stated this after casting his vote at his

Kantigi 005 polling unit of Idati Local Government Council.

Alh Isa Liman Kantigi said that even though he is impress with some of the steps taken by INEC but there are lapses that needed to be corrected in future to enhance it's credibility.

He however advised the electorate to conduct themselves in an orderly manner and ensure that they cast and guard their votes up to the period of counting towards making sure that their votes count.

Alhaji Isa Liman Kantigi further cautioned them against engaging in violence stressing that no meaningful development can be achieved in an atmosphere of rancour.



Bello

Politics

2023 elections and its consequences

For there to be peace, there needs to be justice, and for there to be justice the truth must take precedence. Election is the most fundamental aspect of any democratic nation and it is a process in which the people vote to choose the person or group of people best suited to represent them in developing and uniting their territory (nation), writes IBOBO MELVIN IGBAGI.

IF you notice, the keyword, when talking about election, is centered around people. This is because as a society, we need a group of leaders to ensure orderliness and cohesiveness in our communities in order for us as individuals or group to be able to thrive, utilise our potential and actualise our individual God-given purposes.

That's why it is very important for us as a people to consider the kind of leaders we want to bestow power upon as they won't only be the face of the nation, but the character and icon of our great republic. And also because it is very critical to the sustenance and growth of any nation.

Election needs to be sacred, anything less than an unassailable process is rigged and the consequences of a rigged election is a nation in decline. We examine the American electoral process which is designed as a rigged system by requiring no voters identification, allowing non-citizens to vote as well as allowing mail-in ballots without verifying individual's signatures.

This was used in their 2020 elections and see the outcome, it resulted to seeing the American people going through the highest inflation rate in over 40 years and the world being at the brink of World War 3, then juxtapose it with the just concluded 2023 Nigeria's Presidential and National Assembly elections which were designed to be the most secure, free, fair and transparent election in our history.

INEC was to ensure voters ID cards were intact and implement the BVAS which will make it almost impossible for



the process to be rigged. But in Nigeria, there is a common statement and a reoccurring theme that is used as a general expression when you are in disbelief which is "Wonders shall never end".

How a process that was meant to be above par even beyond the level and standard of the United States of America which is presently in a state of decline due to a rigged election system, how much more will be our fate if we as a people don't demand transparency and justice now?

Are we going to be able to survive another four years of no accountability even in our

current situation as a failed state?

This is the first election I have witnessed as a Nigerian, and it is largely due to the country's economic woes that the youth were so motivated to participate in the electoral process as evidenced by the record, whereby the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) registered over 93 million Nigerians.

Many had to go through difficult circumstances to obtain their PVC, just so they could vote but at the end of the day, less than 25 million ballots were counted, the lowest in Nigerian history that is

less than 27% of all registered voters.

As a result of this, it is incumbent on the INEC to do a review and audit of the process because we as a people will not accept that over N300 billion of tax payers' money (the people's money) be wasted and without accountability.

There must be an explanation why the newly implemented BVAS which was supposed to serve as a security measure in ensuring a fair and transparent process just as when a customer who uses a POS gets a receipt as evidence of his transaction but what we experienced was something entirely different. It turned out to be the greatest scam in Nigeria's electoral history as no result was transmitted in every polling unit in Nigeria after the votes were counted.

This is a reminder to the enemies and saboteurs of our nation that the power of the people is greater than the people in power and that the true power lies with the people. These people sacrificed everything and came out in unprecedented numbers to exercise their civic right and obligation as patriotic citizens despite threats from political opponents, a lack of security from INEC, a lack of coordination from INEC, acts of violence. And the people came out to vote under the rain and you want to rob them or silence their voice! That won't happen not this time! These same people are the ones who will determine the final outcome of this process.

The final outcome of this election will not be determined by the favoured candidate whom the people have overwhelmingly chosen to lead them, but by the people themselves, who will decide which cause they want to support, as the darkest hour always comes before dawn. I urge everyone not to be discouraged, but to be encouraged, and to go out and vote in the upcoming governorship and state legislative elections, exercising your franchise one more time before we take our stand as great Nigerian people.

In conclusion, we will demand as a people that the same day voting is done is the same day results are collated and a winner announced, that the election time be extended and we propose it begins from 8am and end at 5pm. And that the BVAS have a means of printing verified tabulated result and a copy be given to all party agents in each polling unit across the nation.

We appeal to the Supreme Court of Nigeria on behalf of all aggrieved parties to hear this case with fairness and justice because in order for us to move forward and have faith in the system, there must be accountability and auditing of the entire process. When the people's candidates go to the Supreme Court to make their appeal, we the people will be there to take our final stand.

Igbagi, president/founder, People's Dream Initiative, writes from Abuja.

"There must be an explanation why the newly implemented BVAS which was supposed to serve as a security measure in ensuring a fair and transparent process just as when a customer who uses a POS gets a receipt as evidence of his transaction but what we experienced was something entirely different. It turned out to be the greatest scam in Nigeria's electoral history as no result was transmitted in every polling unit in Nigeria after the votes were counted. This is a reminder to the enemies and saboteurs of our nation that the power of the people is greater than the people in power and that the true power lies with the people."

IMAGES

APC EQUITY AND JUSTICE CANVASES SUPPORT FOR MAJE

The All Progressives Congress (APC) Equity and Justice Forum Tuesday held press conference at the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Press Centre, Jos



Cross section of Cameramen covering the event



Chairman of the Forum, Mr. Nuhu Ayuba Shikdima (right) addressing newsmen flanked by Rt. Hon. Joshua Madaki, former, speaker, PLHA and Hon. Iliya S. Mangai



NUJ Chairman, Plateau State Council, Mr. Paul Jatau (left) with Federal Radio Corporation Chief, Mr. Josiah Buzun



NUJ assignment Editor, Pam Musa (right) with Jude Dangwam



Cross section of newsmen during the press briefing by the Forum



NUJ Vice Chairman, Ayuku Pwaspo, Secretary of the council, Peter Amine and other Journalists



Journalists taking notes at the Press Conference



From left are, Nehemiah Joshua Nangol, Nenrot David Longlam and Steve Davou Damar members of the Forum

PHOTOS: DANLADI DUK

Politics

Eschewing religious hatred for national security

The event of Nigeria's independence gave an appearance of the dawn of a united and indivisible nation. But, in fact, it was more of a carry-over from the colonial period of the divisions, fears, and animosities among the various segments of the national polity. At best, independence was a nationalisation of factional groups, each of which saw itself first and foremost as defined through its respective ethno-religious basis, prior to other considerations. SANI DANAUDI MOHAMMED writes.

TODAY, we find ourselves in the capitalist world economy, which simultaneously generated a corresponding cadre of Muslim as well as Christian office-holders-cum-bureaucrats. This inherited narrative of exclusion will definitely form the priorities of the new administration of the APC government to curtail what had been itching Nigerians for over 62 years after independence.

Religion and ethnicity have profound influence on the Nigerian electorate. They are inclined to identify and associate with their faith and ethnicity before nationality. The human society itself is a collection of economic, social and political activities of individuals. This gives them access to the basic necessities of life. Thus, man by nature is a dependent creature; he depends on his environment and others within it for food, shelter and clothing. Therefore, no group or human community, no matter its level of development, can be an island unto itself. This may be the reason Nigerians are fused to their religion or ethnic sentiments.

The just concluded presidential and National Assembly elections will go down in history as the most influenced by both Islamic and Christian clerics, who have been complicit in fanning the embers of religious exclusion and intolerance. They reduced sermons to political gatherings as Nigerians awaited video clips of pronouncements that go for or against their preferred candidates and their political parties. The narrative of exclusion sold against the Tinubu/Shettima presidency has finally been buried with the surgeon of Mr Peter Obi into the political terrain of Nigeria.

Obi's style of campaign capitalised on the sense of alienation among the South-east zone and discontent among some Christians, particularly in the North, due to increased misunderstanding and misconceptions over the APC Muslim-Muslim ticket. In fact, in the North, Mr. Obi concentrated his campaign on churches in states with a large population of Christians and Igbo. Just like some Islamic clerics were furious about Muslim-Muslim ticket, the story is not different from some Christian pastors, who stood on the side of the Labour Party presidential candidate.

On the other hand, the former vice president and PDP presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar candidacy was challenged by some members of his party led by Governor Nyesom Wike of Rivers state. The demand for Iyorchia Ayu's resignation as national chairman of PDP, coming from the same region with Atiku, was to pave the way for a regional balancing. Kwankwanso with a strong base in Kano state picked running mate Pastor Isaac



Yakubu

Idahosa to balance the religion and ethnicity sold against the Tinubu/Shettima ticket. The Labour Party, PDP, New Nigeria People's Party, NNPP, and the rulling All Progressives Congress, APC, none is exempted from playing to the gallery of either religion, region or ethnic politics in the last elections.

The paradox is that it looks like the more religious institutions we build in Nigeria, the more denominations and sects we create, the worse we become morally. Corruption in Nigeria, for example, which is preached against by most (if not all) religious groups, seems to be growing in tandem with our religious expansion. And endemic corruption has severely compromised Nigeria's growth and development. Violence and all forms of criminality have been growing as our churches and mosques grow.

Poor work-ethics and consequent low productivity continue to dog our economic land space. Poor governance and poverty have increased along the same scale as the growth in worship centres in Nigeria. In fact, in Nigeria, people are now stealing and killing in the name of religion even though such dubious acts have no place in the teachings of the holy books. This development has led many to begin to query the impact of religion on our moral tone and economic well being. They seem to be pointing to atheistic nations as Japan, China and Australia as having better moral tone and registering better growth and development than Nigeria where most people practice one form of religion or the

other.

Ohuabunwa said there has been this argument as to whether Nigeria is a secular or non-secular state, religious or non-religious nation. A secular state is one which purports to be officially neutral in matters of religion, supporting neither religion nor irreligion. A secular state also claims to treat all its citizens equally regardless of religion and claims to avoid preferential treatment for a citizen from a particular religion/non religion over other religions/non-religion. Secular states do not have a state religion and this defines the Nigerian State where religion is a belief rather than a political platform.

Thomas Hobbes sees religion and its divisiveness as a source of political instability, and so he argues that the sovereign has the right to determine which opinions may be publicly espoused and disseminated, a power necessary for maintaining civil peace. The relation between religion and politics continues to be an important theme in Nigeria's political philosophy, despite the emergent consensus (both among political theorists and in practical political contexts, such as the United Nations) on the right to freedom of conscience and on the need for some sort of separation between religion and governance. Religions often make strong claims on people's allegiance, and universal religions make these claims on all people, rather than just a particular community.

For example, Islam has traditionally held that all people owe obedience to Allah's will. Thus, it is probably inevitable that religious commitments will sometimes come into conflict with

the demands of politics. But religious beliefs and practices also potentially support politics in many ways. The extent and form of this support is as important to political philosophers as is the possibility for conflict. Moreover, there has been a growing interest in minority groups and the political rights and entitlements they are due. One result of this interest is substantial attention given to the particular concerns and needs of minority groups who are distinguished by their religion, as opposed to ethnicity, gender, or wealth.

In recent time, religion had been politicised and reduced to bread and butter organisation by some of its self-serving clerics by pitching their support to a particular candidate, thereby derailing from its constitutional obligations of being a father to all shades of opinions. This unhealthy attitude, open declaration of support and campaigns for politicians on the podium is gradually eroding their status as men of God to agents of the political elite. Now that the elections have been won and lost, some of them are burying their heads in shame with many of their prophecies gone wrong.

As religious leaders who communicate directly to millions of Nigerians who are either Muslim or Christians, they should take into account the importance and roles of communication in peace building and safeguarding the unity of Nigeria. These should form the basis of their sermons and preaching instead of turning our mosques and churches to political rallies.

The ability of Nigerians to communicate with each other is

perhaps the most fundamental aspect of the country's sustainable peace and development. The diverse nature of human society underscores the deep-seated need for communication and it is against this backdrop that language used in public gatherings must be recognised to be of paramount importance and seen as a unifying factor.

The great task before the incoming president is to urgently deal with this syndrome that played out in the just concluded presidential and National Assembly elections. As a pan-Nigerian by marriage, business and politics, Tinubu lives tight and neck between the two dominant religions in Nigeria. As a devout Muslim, he is married to a senior pastor and has worked all his life by preaching the gospel of building bridges across board which gave him an easy ride to the 2023 presidency. The survival of Nigeria as an entity is certainly his priority and unless these religious and ethnic champions are called to order, the future will not reward us with gold.

As the race for senate president and speaker of the 10th Assembly begins, this will be a ground test for Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the ruling APC in his quest to restore the confidence of Nigerians. His acceptance speech was quite enlightening and educative. The assertion that he is no more Batified but Atikulated, Obedient and Kwankwasiya spoke on his level of readiness to build a country that work for all that voted for and against him. These words and commitment he made are already dousing tension in the country. This means his victory is for all the Nigerian people of all faith as against the narrative of exclusion being peddled around that a particular religion or section of the country won.

The Jagaban himself will not be a toy and cannot be carried away by those insinuations but he will be guided by the mandate given to him by Nigerians from all the length and breadth of the country. The Muslim-Muslim ticket is nothing where democracy works and this victory of the APC has brought an end to the politics of religion, regionalism and ethnicity. Asiwaju won the election not because of his faith; besides being a Muslim, he has proved in words and actions that he is a pan-Nigerian, who prioritises the identity of Nigeria before his tribe, region or religion. I pray he succeeds. His success will end the current division and divisiveness in the country. As Nigerians, we should not fall victims of the ineffective sermons of some clerics and as long as our religions preach peace and love, we must eschew religious hatred for a sustainable national security.

News

Kogi Poly gets 8 chief lecturers, dismisses 4

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

The Governing Council of Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja has approved the promotion of 8 principal lecturers to the prestigious rank of Chief Lecturers.

The Governing Council also approved dismissal of four (4) others for acts of gross misconduct bordering on sexual harassment and victimization of female student, abscondment from duties, insubordination, falsification of record, disobedience to lawful order, diversion of TETFUND training grant, among others.

These were part of the far reaching decisions at the 68th Regular Meeting of the Governing Council held on Wednesday, 8th March, 2023 at the Polytechnic's Council Chamber.

A statement from the Public Relations Unit of the polytechnic indicates that those promoted to Chief Lecturers are: Dr. Ayodele Shade Oluwakemi, Department of Computer Sciences, Mr. Adalumo Adebola, Department of Fine Arts and Mr. Lawal Fatai Kolade, Department of Statistics.

Others are: Dr. Akande Stephen, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Dr. Attah Yusuf Emmanuel, Department of Business Administration, Mr. Joel Tope Ebenezer, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mr. James Oricha, Department of Arts and Social Sciences and Mr. Aleshegba Ebenezer, Department of Industrial Design.

The dismissed staff are: Mr. Abutu Thompson Okolo, Department of Language and Communication, Mr. Ipinmoroti Samuel Adejoro, Mrs. Adegoke Kehinde, Vivian (both of the Department of Architectural Technology) and Sylvester Ojone Blessing of Registry Department.

Mr. Thompson, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Language and Communication, was dismissed on account of sexual harassment and victimization of a female student in the Department of Computer Science.

Mr. Ipinmoroti Samuel Adejoro and Mrs. Adegoke Kehinde Vivian, were dismissed for disobedience to lawful order, falsification of document to obtain training grant and diversion of the said training grant to the tune of 22,676,500.00 and 21,204,000.00 respectively.

The council further directed the management to use available legal means to recover from Mr. Ipinmoroti and Mrs. Adegoke the total sum of 22,676,500 and 21,204,000 respectively, being the fund they fraudulently collected as training grant without undergoing the training at the approved university in Malaysia.

Mrs. Sylvester Ojone Blessing was dismissed for absconding from duty from 5th January, 2020 to 31st July, 2022.

Mrs. Ojone is to refund the sum of 1,356,653.79, being the unearned salaries drawn from the government within the period of abscondment.

In a related development, the polytechnic also terminated the appointment of Mr. Aremu Oloruntoba Samuel of the Department of Social Science and Humanities, School of General and Communication Studies, on account of gross misconduct bordering on extortion of students in the name of Continuous Assessment (CA).

The probationary appointment of Mr. Aremu was therefore terminated, just as he was directed to refund the sum of two hundred and ten thousand naira (N210,000.00) only being the illegal money he imposed and collected from the students for Continuous Assessment (CA).

The Chairman of the Governing



Adamu

Council on behalf of the council lauded the management of the polytechnic under the rectors, Dr. Salisu Ogbo Usman, for its dedication to service, just as he calls for more positive reforms for sustainable academic development and excellence in the institution.

The chairman also congratulated the newly promoted Chief Lecturers and charged them to justify the promotion with more dedication, hardwork and excellent research for academic development.

Dr. Usman appreciated the chairman and members of the Governing Council for the

sustained support and consistent encouragement.

The rector while joining the chairman of the Governing Council to congratulate the newly promoted staff, he also admonished staff at all levels to desist from unethical conducts capable of tarnishing the hard earned reputation of the polytechnic and specifically their family name.

The rector specifically appreciated His Excellency, Alhaji Yahaya Adoza Bello, the Executive Governor of Kogi State, for providing the enablement for the entrenching reforms by not interfering in the internal administration of the polytechnic.

Salem Varsity celebrates Chancellor at 70

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

THE management, staff and students of Salem University Lokoja have felicitated with Archbishop Sam Amaga, the university's chancellor on the occasion of his 70th birthday.

Prof. Alewo Johnson-Akubo, the Vice Chancellor (VC), of the University made the declaration in a congratulatory message he personally signed and issued to newsmen in Lokoja.

The VC said, "On behalf of my family, management, staff and students of Salem University, Lokoja, I wish our Chancellor and spiritual Father, Archbishop Sam Amaga a very sound health, peace and joy as he celebrates his 70th birthday, Wednesday, March 15."

He appreciated God for giving Nigeria and particularly Kogi State such an illustrious and industrious son and father in the person of Archbishop Sam Amaga.

Johnson-Akubo described Archbishop Amaga, who is the visionary and founding Chancellor of Salem University Lokoja, as an "astute leader" and "God-send" to this present generation.

"Today being March 15, 2023, we in Salem University Lokoja, join Foundation Faith Church and other well wishers around the world to congratulate our visionary and founding chancellor, Archbishop Sam Amaga on his 70th birthday.

"As a committed and faithful servant of God, the Archbishop has demonstrated his love and care for the young ones by establishing Salem University Lokoja for the harvest, grooming and development of change agents that could impact the world.

"This singular feat has indeed made our Chancellor a patriot and mentor, who has made significant contributions to the spiritual and educational growth and development of Nigeria."

The VC added, "As our Chancellor and spiritual father, you have made significant impact on the lives of many, particularly members of Foundation Faith Church and students of Salem University Lokoja that will continue to linger for eternity."

KDSG releases N920M for pensioners

KADUNA State Government has released N920 million for the settlement of outstanding pension liabilities which include death benefits and gratuity.

A statement issued from Sir Kashim Ibrahim House and signed by Muiyiwa Adekeye S.A Media, stated that the payment schedule which was dated March 9th, 2023, comprises state and local government pensioners in the old Defined Benefit Scheme (DBS).

The statement further disclosed that state pensioners will get N400 million while local government beneficiaries will receive N520 million.

It will be recalled that last November, Governor Nasir El-Rufai had approved N900 million for the payment of Accrued Rights for retirees and families of deceased beneficiaries under the new Contributory Pension

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

THE Managing Director of Hydroelectric Power Producing Areas Development Commission (HYPPDEC), Alhaji Abubakar SadiqYelwa has hinted that seventy communities in Ibaji Riverine Areas of Kogi State will henceforth be granted special intervention privilege in view of their deplorable environmental location.

The Managing Director disclosed this while on an inspection tour of Ibaji Local Government Area to identify problems associated with its environmental crisis and possible areas of assistance.

The Managing Director during the inspection visit, met with the Ata'Igala, Alhaji Matthew OpaluwaOguche-Akpa at his palace in Idah and the Chairman of Ibaji Local Government Area Traditional Council, Chief John Egwemi at Onyedega, headquarters of Ibaji to dialogue on the way forward for the success of HYPPDEC intervention scheme in their domains.

According to AlhajiYelwa who was in company of his entire management team, "The findings of HYPPDEC had revealed that communities in Ibaji Local Government Area for decades have suffered untold hardship ranging from lack of access roads to inability to carry out development in the zone as a result of the impact of natural disaster such as heavy flooding and erosion menace being experienced on yearly basis. This terrible situation has placed Ibaji LGA on disadvantage position as worst heat in terms of natural calamities above other HYPPDEC member communities in Kogi State, hence our

HYPPDEC considers Ibaji for special intervention benefits



Fashola

consideration to focus more in giving special attention and assistance to the zone.

"In the course of our inspection visit, we have seen the deplorable condition of the access roads to Ibaji which is very pathetic. We will make our impact towards road rehabilitation as well as provision of boreholes, mitigation of devastating flooding among others to boost socio-economic activities in Ibaji and improve on the living condition of the people.

"So far 1,800 communities have benefited from our intervention programme across the country and we are glad that we are making significant impact to cushion the effect of difficulties faced by the people of HYPPDEC member communities." The Ata'Igala, Alhaji Matthew OpaluwaOguche-Akpa in his speech, commended HYPPDEC for its quick intervention to the plight of victims of last year's flooding in KogiState of which four local government areas in his domain were beneficiaries.

His Royal Majesty told the Managing Director of HYPPDEC that he will not relent in giving useful advice on the way forward for the success of its scheme in his domain.

In his own remarks, the EjeIbaji and Chairman of Ibaji LGA Traditional Council, Chief John Egwemi identified dredging of River Niger and construction of more dams as the only way to effectively tackle the problem of flooding in Nigeria.

He said the establishment of HYPPDEC is a blessing to riverine communities and lauded the agency for its numerous assistance to the people of Ibaji during difficult times.

Highpoint of the visit was the conferment of honorary chieftaincy title on the HYPPDEC Managing Director, AlhajiAbubakarSadiqYelwa as "AbenecheAta'Igala, meaning Ata's Confidant with salutation "WALI" in recognition of his contributions towards the upliftment of mankind and socio-economic activities in Igala Kingdom.



el-Rufai

Scheme(CPS).

The Executive Secretary of Kaduna State Pension Bureau, Prof SalamatUisah, had said that the amount covered batch 54 for the state and local governments

retirees and families of the deceased.

Prof Isah further explained that payment of retirees under the Contributory Pension Scheme is being done by the Pension Funds Administrators under the old Defined Benefits (PFA s), adding that

Giving breakdown of the payment, the Executive Secretary had said that N600,000,000 has been allocated to the state retirees and deceased families, while N300,000,000 was allocated to local governments retirees and families of the deceased.

The November 2022 release came two weeks after Governor El Rufai had earlier approved N1, 160,000,000.00 for the payment of gratuity for batch 17 Local Government pensioners and batch 19 of the Contributory Pension state government retirees and families of deceased Pension Funds Administrators under the old Defined Benefits Scheme (DBS).

News

Military personnel flex muscles against journalists

From MATHEW JWANTU, Minna

MILITARY personnel have attacked journalists on their official assignment of covering the Governorship and House of Assembly elections in Kontagora Local Government Area of Niger State.

The said military group who mounted road block in front of the Landmark Radio Station in Kontagora town further threatened to shoot the reporter for passing through the blocked portion of the road.

It was reliably gathered that an under-aged boy who shifted the plank on the road to pave way for the reporters to pass, was subjected to punishments.

Even as the journalists explained to the said military corporal that they are Landmark Radio



Isiguzor

staff, he still threatened to shoot one of the reporters, urging him to take over the punishment meted on the young boy which caused more pandemonium.

Despite the fact that the journalists were having their press jacket on, hanging their press tag and carrying their identity

card, they said military personnel refused to listen to their explanation.

However, it took the intervention of the leader of the military group who is a senior officer (Lieutenant Colonel) to resolve the matter but the identified Lance Corporal Samson remained adamant.

Sokoto gets Justices of Peace

From ANENE AIKE, Sokoto

SOKOTO State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Suleiman Usman SAN, Life Bencher has sworn in 5 Justices of the Peace acting under the Sokoto State Preservation of Peace Law Cap. 104, Laws of Sokoto State 1996.

This was contained in a statement issued to press by the PRO of the Ministry of Justice, Sokoto State.

The 5 Justices of the Peace includes: Wadata G Muhammad Esq, Mubarak SidiYahayaEsq, AbubakarMoyiEsq, Umar AliyuEsq and Sufiyanu Umar Maikulki Esq.

The state Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Suleiman Usman SAN said the swearing-in is necessary in view of the determination of the Sokoto State Government to implement one of the laws of the state, to utilise to the fullest Public Peace in the state because without peace there would be no harmony and development. According to the the Commissioner under the Peace Preservation Laws cap 104 of Sokoto State as amended, a Justice of the Peace has the power to

preserve the peace, riots and affrays as well as disperse all disorderly and tumultuous assemblages.

The statement added that the Justice of the Peace has the power to hear traffic and other Class C misdemeanor cases punishable by fine only, Hears civil cases with up to fine of N100,000.00 in controversy.

Other cases include: Landlord and tenant disputes, truancy cases, performs magistrate duties, conducts inquests and has power to direct - post-mortem examination among others.

Furthermore, he has all rights and duties of a magistrate under the law including but not limited to; issue summons and warrants for compelling attendance of accused persons or witnesses.

Issue writ of summons and summons in civil cases, admit to bail accused persons,

issue search warrant, take solemn affirmations and statutory declarations, issuing and signing remand warrants.

The statement further said, the Governor shall have power to take necessary measures to preserve public peace throughout the state by order and /regulations under this law.



Tambuwal



Deploying technology for common good

IN the good old days, life was so simple, yet not so easy to deal with because of the absence of the tools that are available to us these days. To be honest, I have forgotten how my hand writing looks like. I am certain a lot others share the same concerns that currently occupy my mind. I am not sure too if hand writing is still taught in our schools where you are scored in the subject at examination. I sometimes think that we are losing some of our core values due to the fact that society is making some form of progress.

To be sure, this progress is good. Modern and easier ways of doing things are sought and found and jobs get done in record time and with less stress. That is where we have found ourselves. Yes, thanks to technology we have been able to do a lot of tasking jobs with relative ease. Unfortunately, this new ways of doing things provided by technology seem to have the potential to create some form of dislocation to the very society that worked very hard to create it in the first place. Science is an important and excellent tool which has helped in solving a lot of society's problems. However, in course of trying to solve some of these issues, it has generated further problems needing further interrogation and resolution.

With an android phone in a person's hand, he can do a lot of things both positive and negative. He can create wealth and add value and he can as well cause confusion and destroy the society that has creted the android phone to ease the performance of tasks that were hitherto not easy to perform. The new media has been a source of blessings to many and has equally been a source of sorrow for many. Some have lost their lives simply because technology had been deployed wrongly.

If you live in any crisis prone area you will understand what I am talking about. Crises are effortlessly stocked with the use of new technologies. People get killed for no fault of their own because some mad

and unconscionable persons decide to spread what is commonly referred to these days as fake and unverified news. I often allude to the "an fara" phenomenon, particularly in Jos. This situation often creates tension-filled situations. I remember a couple of years back I had the misfortune of being in the Terminus area to pick up a friend who had come into town for the weekend. While waiting for him to cross over from the opposite side of the busy road, everything just went bursts and everyone started running.

In the confusion that ensued, my friend, who was new in town almost towed the same line until I told him to calm down and comport himself. When he entered the car he asked what the problem was and I told him that no one can exactly say what the problem was. As we drove out of the Terminus area we saw a lot of cars that ran into each other and in the process caused a lot of damage to themselves. Indeed, as we were making our way out of the crowd back to safety and sanity a woman ran towards us struggling to gain entry into my car so she could escape the madness. When she could not gain entrance I asked her what the

problem was but she could give me no reason. When I picked her and we went out of confusion and to sanity, I again asked why she was running and she said she saw everyone running and she too joined to escape from what was not known to her.

This is how bad our situation has become since 2001. We have become a sort of "killjoy to ourselves. We no longer have the presence of mind to analyze situations but act on the spur of the moment by just drawing conclusions and joining the fray. Another instance would further buttress our present-day realities. During the Ebola conflagration, a lot of unverified stories occupied our social media space where a lot of people had to take salt baths and drank salt which led to their untimely deaths. People who were suffering from hypertension exacerbated their conditions by gulping down huge amounts of salt and had to be rushed to medical facilities where some could does not make it just because some ladies started a joke in their university hostel which went viral and caused untold hardships to many families.

What "Random Musings" set out to do this week is to bring to the fore some of the harms we bring upon ourselves by the misuse of modern technology. That as much as there are a lot of advantages in deploying modern technology, we must and should be able to show restraint in ensuring that we do not use it negatively. Whatever we do that would lead to negative consequences for society is best left out. If we must return to learning handwriting so that it would increase our capacity to be patient and objective, let us learn patience again. I dare suggest that these new technologies that have brought about sorrow and tears to some families like in the words of the music icon, Fela Kuti, should be subjected to some form of control. If this is not done, some mad person would come up someday and use the tool that is supposed to ease our work to destroy our society.

“
With an android phone in a person's hand, he can do a lot of things both positive and negative. He can create wealth and add value and he can as well cause confusion and destroy the society that has creted the android phone to ease the performance of tasks that were hitherto not easy to perform. The new media has been a source of blessings to many and has equally been a source of sorrow for many. Some have lost their lives simply because technology had been deployed wrongly.”

News

Kogi abducted INEC staff regain freedom

From **AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja**

KOGI State Police Command has rescued 99 staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) that were kidnapped in the early hours of Sunday.

The INEC staff were returning from communities in the Lokoja 11 state constituency when they were kidnapped around 2 am on Sunday around Obajana junction which is less than 20km from the state capital.

Spokesman of the Command, SP WILLIAM Aya in a statement made available to journalists in Lokoja on Monday, disclosed that "On Sunday 19th of March, 2023, INEC officials and adhoc staff came under heavy attack by armed hoodlums at Obajana while on their way from Kupa North and South Wards to the Constituency Collation Centre in Lokoja. The Police escort attached to the team responded robustly and engaged the hoodlums in a fierce gun duel.

"On receipt of the distress call, reinforcement teams were promptly mobilized and sent to the scene which equally engaged the attackers and owing to the superior firepower of the police, the attackers were forced to flee with varying degrees of injuries.

"The Commissioner of Police in-charge of Election in Kogi State, CP Yekini Ayoku, led the rescue team to the scene for



Bello

an on-the-spot assessment. He later led the evacuation of the ninety-six (96) rescued victims comprising INEC officials, adhoc staff, bus drivers and others to the INEC Headquarters in Lokoja. While the three (3) injured victims were evacuated to the Federal Medical Centre, Lokoja for treatment.

"The Commissioner of Police has accordingly ordered the deployment of operational and tactical assets of the Force to embark on thorough combing of the general area with a view to apprehending the attackers and to rescue the two (2) victims yet to be accounted for.

"The CP further tasked the

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Criminal Investigation Department to commence thorough investigation with a view to apprehending the miscreants and bringing them to deserved justice.

"The Commissioner of Police while commending the gallantry displayed by the men of the Force, urged members of the public, particularly the adjoining communities to be on the lookout and report anybody seen with bullet wounds to the nearest security formation or agencies. He assured the public that the police will not rest on its oars in the fight against criminality in the state".

From **ABBAS GUNGURA, Bauchi**

THE Bauchi State Commissioner of Youths and Sports Development, Alhaji Adamu Manu Soro, has disassociated himself from a video Twitter clip alleging him to be the one canvassing votes for the PDP in the state prior to the Saturday Governorship and House of Assembly elections held on 18th -March 2023.

The commissioner, while refuting the report in an interview with some journalists in Hausa language, expressed worry on how it named him as the person in the Twitter clip, threatening to take legal action against the medium of communication that implicated him in the report.

THE NIGERIA STANDARD in Bauchi reports that since last Friday, a Twitter clip showed a picture of a person which it claimed to be the commissioner in Bauchi buying votes for PDP from the electorate ahead of the Saturday's polls. This clip was globally being watched on the twitter clip pages.

According to him, "My name

Commissioner denies vote buying allegation



Yakubu

is honorable Adamu Manu Soro, Commissioner for Youths and Sports Development in Bauchi State".

In his defense he pointed out that whoever knows Bauchi State knows that Governor Bala Mohammed has performed creditably well in the past three and a half years in the execution of capital projects, hence it is naive for

someone to allege vote buying for the ruling PDP in the state.

"I'm not the one in the said video clips going round globally, so anyone or medium of communication that publish or make a story from the video clips does so at his own risk intending to defame my image and reputation in the eyes of reasonable Nigerians. And by God's grace, I'll take a legal action against that".

Kogi plans recruitment of additional 2,000 teachers

From **AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja**

In its bid to boost quality education at secondary school level, the Kogi State Government says it has concluded plans to recruit additional two thousand teachers soon.

State Commissioner for Education, Science and Technology, Wemi Jones disclosed this in an interview with our correspondent.

Wemi Jones said that Governor Yahaya Bello has given an approval to that effect as part of the present administration's desire to bequeath a legacy in education sub-sector.

According to him, more mathematics teachers will be recruited in the quest to boost science education as well as other fields of learning.

On 1,000 teachers who were recently employed, the Commissioner said documentation is ongoing before final posting to their respective schools across the state.

He restated the commitment of the state

government to adequately fund and equip secondary schools with learning and instructional materials as well as make them conducive enough for staff to perform their duties optimally.

On the just concluded elections, Hon Wemi Jones commended all relevant stakeholders especially the ruling party, the All Progressives Party, APC, for playing by the rules of the game which gave it landmark victories across board in a peaceful atmosphere.

He congratulated all the winners, especially the Kabba/ Bunu House of Assembly elect, Hon. Bello Oluwaseyi Victor for his emergence and prayed God to uphold him for a fruitful service to the people.

INEC reschedules Governorship/ Assembly polls in Kwande

From **TERESE TUHWA, Makurdi**

THE Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has rescheduled the March 18th, 2023 Governorship and state House of Assembly elections in Kwande Local Government Area to Tuesday 21 March, 2023.

Benue State Resident Electoral Commissioner, Professor Samuel Egwu told news men at the INEC Collation Centre, Makurdi in a press conference Monday that the clarification became necessary following speculations trailing the suspension of both

Governorship and state House of Assembly election in Kwande Local Government Area.

Professor Egwu said after due consultations with stakeholders and other interested parties from the affected local government, the commission has fixed the exercise on Tuesday 21 March, 2023 as approved by the commission's headquarters Abuja.

On whether the commission will declare the overall winner even if result from Kwande Local Government Area where elections are yet to be

conducted are yet to be known, the REC asserted that it will amount to academic exercise should the commission do that. He added that until results from the 22 local government areas are collated before the commission will decide whether to announce the overall winner on wait for result from Kwande Local Government Area to be presented before final declaration.

He explained that conduct of the governorship election is guided by law and the

commission will not for any reason operate at variance with the provisions of the Electoral Law.

It will be recalled that INEC had suspended conduct of the Saturday 18th March, 2023 Governorship and state House of Assembly election in Kwande Local Government Area following what it described as printing error where ballot papers meant for Kwande West state constituency were exchanged for Kwande East state constituency.

INEC declares clergy winner of Benue Governorship polls

From **TERESE TUHWA, Makurdi**

THE Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Monday declared Reverend Father Hyacinth Iormem Alia of the All Progressives Congress (APC) winner of the just concluded Saturday 18th March, 2023 gubernatorial and state Houses of Assembly elections in Benue State.

Father Alia polled a total of 473,973 votes to defeat his closest rival, Rt. Hon. Titus Tyoapine Uba who scored a total of 223,915 votes to come second position.

The winner of the keenly contested polls was announced after results from 22 Local Government areas

out of 23 were collated.

Professor Farouq Kutah who was the returning officer for the election made the declaration at the state INEC collation centre Makurdi Monday.

Prof Kutah who is also the Vice Chancellor, Federal University of Technology Minna Niger State while announcing the result said; "This formal declaration is hinged on the fact that we rely on the Electoral Act section 24 subsection 1 and the Electoral guidelines of the Independent National Electoral Commission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

"That Hyacinth Alia of APC having satisfied all the

requirements of the law is hereby declared the winner and is returned elected this day, 20th of March, 2023".

Meanwhile, the Governor-elect, Reverend Father Hyacinth Iormem Alia in his acceptance speech at his Makurdi private residence promised that he will build an economy of the future based on skills and talents, education and the application of technology knowing what the forces of global competition and technology mean, and that the state can only compete based on skills and talents.

The visibly joyous Catholic cleric said he will clear the backlog of arrears of

salaries, pension and gratuities, resettle the internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their ancestral homes, address persistent insecurity challenges as well as set the stage for a prosperous Benue.

According to him, his victory was a defeat to politics of backwardness, hate and division in preference for a social contract that enhances a common brotherhood that adds value to lives.

He said the "people through his victory have risen from the ashes of deprivation and depression and are marching towards their rightful place in the hall of greatness".



Adamu

Foreign Commentary

Will Putin ever face a war crimes trial?

Although the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague has issued a warrant for President Vladimir Putin's arrest, it is no more than the first step in a very long process, ROBERT PLUMMER writes.

THE United Nations clearly believes there is sufficient evidence to accuse the Russian leader of war crimes in Ukraine.

However, the practical and logistical problems in pursuing such a case are immense.

This is what the process of bringing Mr Putin to justice could look like.

At present, the Russian leader enjoys unchallenged power in his native land, so there is no prospect of the Kremlin handing him over to the ICC.

As long as he stays put in Russia, he faces no risk of being arrested.

Mr Putin could be detained if he leaves the country. But given the fact that his freedom of movement is already severely limited by international sanctions against him, he is unlikely to show up in a country that would want to put him on trial.

Since Russian troops invaded Ukraine in February 2022, he has visited just eight countries. Seven of those would be considered by him to be part of Russia's "near abroad" - that is, they were constituent parts of the Soviet Union before it collapsed at the end of 1991.

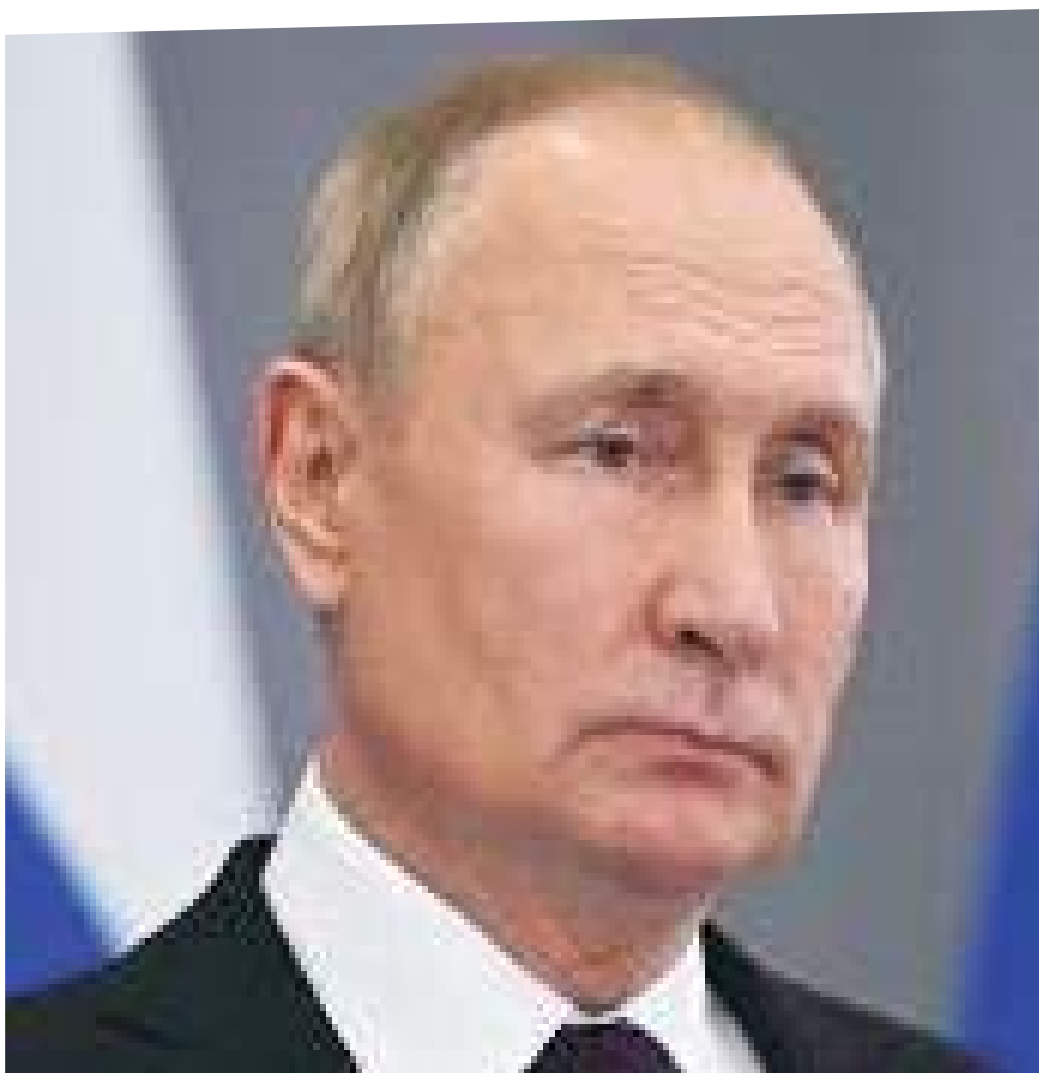
His only recent destination that does not fall into this category is Iran, which he visited in July last year to meet the theocracy's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

Since Iran has helped the Russian war effort by supplying drones and other military hardware, any repeat visit to Tehran would be unlikely to place Mr Putin in any jeopardy.

There are at least two big obstacles to that. Firstly, Russia does not recognise the jurisdiction of the ICC.

The court was established in 2002 by a treaty known as the Rome Statute.

This statute lays down that it



Putin

is the duty of every state to exercise its own criminal jurisdiction over those responsible for international crimes. The ICC can only intervene where a state is unable or unwilling to carry out the investigation and prosecute perpetrators.

In all, 123 states have agreed to abide by it, but there are some significant exceptions, including Russia.

Some countries, including Ukraine, have signed the treaty, but not ratified it. You

can see a full list of countries that are party to the Rome Statute here.

So you can see that the legal position is already getting shaky.

And secondly, although it's not unknown for trials to be held without the defendant in the dock, that's not an option here. The ICC does not conduct trials in absentia, so that avenue is closed off too.

The idea of trying people for crimes against humanity pre-dates the existence of the ICC.

It began in 1945 after World War Two with the Nuremberg Trials, which were held to

punish key members of the hierarchy in Nazi Germany for the Holocaust and other atrocities.

Those included Nazi leader Adolf Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess, who was sentenced to life imprisonment and died by his own hand in 1987.

Of course, Mr Putin has not actually been charged with crimes against humanity, even though US Vice-President Kamala Harris has argued that he should be.

And if he were, that would pose another legal dilemma as the UN itself says, "crimes against humanity have not yet been codified in a dedicated

treaty of international law, unlike genocide and war crimes, although there are efforts to do so."

Other bespoke bodies have sought to convict those accused of war crimes. That includes the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, a UN organisation that existed from 1993 to 2017.

During that time, it convicted and sentenced 90 people. But arguably the most notorious of those indicted, former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, died of a heart attack in 2006 while in detention.

As for the ICC itself, it has so far indicted 40 individuals apart from Mr Putin, all from African countries. Of those, 17 people have been detained at The Hague, 10 have been convicted of crimes and four have been acquitted.

The arrest warrant is being seen as a signal from the international community that what is taking place in Ukraine is against international law.

The court says the reason it is going public with these warrants is that these crimes are continuing. In doing so, it is trying to deter further crimes taking place.

But, the main reaction from Russia so far has been to dismiss the warrants as meaningless.

In fact, the Kremlin denies its forces have committed any atrocities in Ukraine, and Mr Putin's spokesman called the ICC's decision "outrageous and unacceptable".

Faced with such defiance, it seems unlikely that the ICC's actions will have any impact on Russia's war in Ukraine - and Mr Putin's "special military operation" will continue to grind mercilessly on.

Source: BBC News International.

"The arrest warrant is being seen as a signal from the international community that what is taking place in Ukraine is against international law. The court says the reason it is going public with these warrants is that these crimes are continuing. In doing so, it is trying to deter further crimes taking place. But, the main reaction from Russia so far has been to dismiss the warrants as meaningless. In fact, the Kremlin denies its forces have committed any atrocities in Ukraine, and Mr Putin's spokesman called the ICC's decision "outrageous and unacceptable. Faced with such defiance, it seems unlikely that the ICC's actions will have any impact on Russia's war in Ukraine - and Mr Putin's "special military operation" will continue to grind mercilessly on."



Abdulqawi

Foreign News

US urges Xi on Putin over 'war crimes'

THE two will meet again on Tuesday for official talks during Mr Xi's first visit to Moscow since the invasion.

The White House's National Security Council spokesman called on Mr Xi to urge his Russian counterpart to withdraw troops from Ukraine.

John Kirby said seeking a ceasefire would not be enough.

In another development, Japan's Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, is making a surprise visit to Ukraine for talks with President Volodymyr Zelensky. He is expected to voice solidarity and support for Ukraine following Russia's invasion.

Japan and China see each other as regional rivals. Since Russia's war in Ukraine began, Tokyo has provided Kyiv with a mixture of humanitarian, financial and non-lethal military aid.

On Monday, Mr Xi and Mr Putin held more than four hours of what were described as informal talks, with more formal discussions scheduled for Tuesday.

There are concerns that China's support for Russia - currently based on technology and trade - might become military, potentially including artillery shells.

Mr Putin has said he will discuss a 12-point plan proposed by Mr Xi to "settle the acute crisis in Ukraine".

China released its plan to end the war last month - it includes "ceasing hostilities" and resuming peace talks.

China's plan did not specifically say that Russia must withdraw from Ukraine - which Ukraine has insisted as a precondition for any talks.

The plan also condemned the usage of "unilateral sanctions" - seen as a veiled criticism of Ukraine's allies in the West.

On Monday, a military band gave Mr Xi a warm welcome to Moscow at the start of the three-day visit. Mr Putin hailed China for "observing the principles of justice" and pushing for "undivided security for every country".

He added that China had made "a tremendous leap forward in its development" in recent years, remarking: "We even feel a bit envious."

Before Mr Xi's arrival, Mr Putin wrote in China's People's Daily newspaper that the two nations would not be weakened by "aggressive" US policy.

Ukrainian leaders have been publicly emphasising the common ground they have with China - respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity - but privately, they have been lobbying for a meeting or telephone call between President Volodymyr Zelensky and Mr Xi.

This was echoed by Mr Kirby, the US security spokesman, who urged Mr Xi "to play a constructive role" in the effort to end the conflict by speaking with Mr Zelensky.

Russia is a source of oil for Beijing's huge economy, and is seen as a partner in standing up to the US.

Russian matryoshka dolls with portraits of the Chinese and Russian presidents have been on sale in Moscow



Biden

Mr Xi's visit to Moscow comes days after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for the Russian president over war crime allegations. This means Mr Putin could technically be arrested in 123 countries - though neither China nor Russia are on that list.

Western leaders have been attempting since last February to isolate Russia, following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

But they have been unable to establish a global consensus, with China, India and several African nations reluctant to condemn Mr Putin.

Ethiopia says US war crime allegations 'inflammatory'

ETHIOPIA'S government has accused the United States of taking a "partisan" approach by alleging that its forces, and Eritrean troops, had committed war crimes during the two-year conflict in Tigray. "The US statement is inflammatory," the foreign ministry said in a statement on Tuesday, a day after Washington accused all parties to the conflict of committing war crimes but singled out Ethiopian, Eritrean and regional Amhara forces for crimes against humanity, without mentioning forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Last week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made his

first visit to Ethiopia since a November 2022 peace deal between the federal government and Tigrayan rebels. On Monday, after returning to Washington, he made a forceful call for accountability. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed in the conflict, with some estimates placing the death toll as high as 600,000. There were also reports of rapes, massacres of civilians, forcible deportations and ethnic cleansing. Blinken said the State Department carried out a "careful review of the law and the facts" and concluded that war crimes were committed by federal troops from Ethiopia and its ally Eritrea, as

well as by the TPLF and forces from the neighbouring Amhara region. "Many of these actions were not random or a mere byproduct of war. They were calculated and deliberate," Blinken said as he presented the annual US human rights report.

He added that the State Department also found crimes against humanity by Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces, including killings and sexual violence, although he did not mention the TPLF. In its response on Tuesday, Ethiopia's foreign ministry said the US statement "unfairly apportioned blame among different parties in the conflict".

Evoking biblical "prophecies" that are "beginning to come true", Smotrich said: "After 2,000 years ... God is gathering his people. The people of Israel are returning home."

Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, dubbed the minister's remarks "completely unhelpful", stressing the Palestinian people "obviously" exists.

The European Union's foreign policy chief also criticised Smotrich's statement. Smotrich, who met no French

government officials during his trip, was speaking from a lectern which featured a map of so-called Greater Israel, including the occupied West Bank, Golan Heights, blockaded Gaza Strip and Jordan - the neighbouring Arab country that signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967, when it also seized East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.

Smotrich's comments came as Israeli and Palestinian representatives met in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh along with Egyptian, Jordanian and United States officials for "extensive discussions on ways to de-escalate tensions", according to a joint statement.

Smotrich, who lives in an illegal West Bank settlement, had called in early March for the Palestinian town of Huwara to be "wiped out" after two Israelis were shot dead there by an alleged Hamas fighter.

Hundreds of rampaging Israeli settlers torched Palestinian homes and cars in Huwara after the shooting, and a Palestinian man was killed in a nearby village.

Violence has intensified in the West Bank in recent months, with fears of further escalation during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, due to begin this week.

US police on alert ahead of Trump arrest

POLICE in major US cities are preparing for potential unrest in case ex-President Donald Trump is arrested this week as part of a hush-money inquiry.

Authorities in New York, Washington DC and Los Angeles are ramping up their law enforcement presence.

A Manhattan prosecutor may charge Mr Trump over how he declared a payment to a porn star to keep quiet about an alleged affair.

It would be the first criminal case brought against a former US president.

Steel barricades were being erected on Monday outside the Manhattan Criminal Court, where Mr Trump could be charged, fingerprinted and photographed if charges are filed this week, as US media widely anticipate.

Increased police presence has also been seen outside Trump Tower in the city.

Every member of the New

Arab states condemn Israeli minister's remark



Zayed Al

government officials during his trip, was speaking from a lectern which featured a map of so-called Greater Israel, including the occupied West Bank, Golan Heights, blockaded Gaza Strip and Jordan - the neighbouring Arab country that signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967, when it also seized East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.

Smotrich's comments came as Israeli and Palestinian representatives met in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh along with Egyptian, Jordanian and United States officials for "extensive discussions on ways to de-escalate tensions", according to a joint statement.

Smotrich, who lives in an illegal West Bank settlement, had called in early March for the Palestinian town of Huwara to be "wiped out" after two Israelis were shot dead there by an alleged Hamas fighter.

Hundreds of rampaging Israeli settlers torched Palestinian homes and cars in Huwara after the shooting, and a Palestinian man was killed in a nearby village.

Violence has intensified in the West Bank in recent months, with fears of further escalation during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, due to begin this week.

The Israeli defence ministry body responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories on Monday relaxed a series of tight restrictions with the aim of allowing more Palestinians to worship at Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, during Ramadan.

More civil disturbance officers will also be on standby, though the congressional source said there was no specific threat and that the order was proactive.

US police on alert ahead of Trump arrest

More civil disturbance officers will also be on standby, though the congressional source said there was no specific threat and that the order was proactive.

In Los Angeles, the LAPD and federal officials were preparing for a pro-Trump protest on Tuesday outside a federal building, the LA Times newspaper reports.

Police erect barricades outside the Manhattan court on Monday

US intelligence officials have detected an uptick in online threats against legal and government officials since Mr Trump wrote online on Saturday that he expected to be arrested on Tuesday, according to CBS.

Most of the threats were against Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, the man widely expected to file charges against Mr Trump.

The order aims to increase co-ordination with other law enforcement agencies.



Zewde

Feature

Food chemical: Implication on Nigeria's trade

According to Nigerian Agricultural Quarantine Service (NAQS), Nigeria loses about \$362.5m yearly in terms of foreign exchange to the ban on the exportation of beans in the last eight years. The banned beans were found to contain between 0.03mg kilograms to 4.6mg/kg of Dichlorvos; a pesticide activity ingredient ban in the EU since 2006 and many other countries (like Japan, China, India, Canada, Australia, etc) due to its health and environmental effects. According to the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), over 76 per cent of the country's commodities are often rejected by the EU for not meeting required safety standards. DONALD IKENNA OFOEGBU writes.

AGRICULTURAL products like beans, sesame seeds, melon seeds, dried fish, dried meat, peanut groundnut, palm oil and yam, exported from Nigeria have in the past 10 years been banned by the EU due to the presence of dangerous pesticide residues.

In 2013, 24 agro-products originating from Nigeria but exported to the United Kingdom were rejected, the figure increased to 42 in 2014. In 2016, 24 exported food products were also rejected. Recent data on similar rejections are yet to be reported as the ban persists on our food export markets.

Recently, the Japanese government have given Nigeria a warning signal of a possible rejection of Nigeria's sesame seed due to the presence of pesticide residue; with Nigeria accounting for 30% of Japanese sesame import, this will spell huge loss for the country. In fact, over 48 per cent of pesticide active ingredients still registered in Nigeria have been withdrawn from the European market, in part because of their high human and environmental toxicity. The export of crops grown with such pesticides to Europe or other target markets with similar regulations is automatic rejected.

The European Council of the European Union (EU) presented their 'farm to fork' strategy in May 2020, as one of the key actions under the European Green Deal. The strategy intends to shift the current EU food system towards making their food systems fair, safer, nutritious, healthy, environmentally friendly, organic and sustainable. The strategy foresees a number of initiatives and legislative proposals, among others, to cut pesticide use by 50% by 2030, improve organic farming, improve front-of-pack nutrition labelling and sustainable food labelling, etc. With more countries making similar shifts away from hazardous pesticides to a safer, organic and sustainable farm system and food. What is the implication of this on Nigeria's future trade balance; and how should agribusinesses and farmers respond to this? Can the Nigerian government, her farm communities and businesses take advantage of the global shift and become the world capital of safer nutritious food?

The rejection of Nigeria's agricultural food export is a major setback for a country desperate to expand its export basket, increase FOREX earnings and create jobs. Aside the money lost by exporters and the Nigerian government, the continuous rejection of Nigeria's food export is a dent in the country's image.

The forbidden fruits – tested, and rejected internationally, are traded and consumed locally by Nigerians. A recent survey shows that 7 out of the 13 active ingredients in the most common pesticide brands used to grow food by small-scale women farmers in Nigeria are cancer-causing. 75% of the surveyed women farmers report health challenges which they attribute to pesticide use. 25% of registered pesticide products as of 2019 have been proven carcinogenic, 63 mutagenic, 262 neurotoxicity and 244 show clear effects on reproduction. The lab results on crops, water and soil samples collected from farms,



markets, and rivers in Nigeria show the presence of highly hazardous pesticide residues, which are injected by consumers and used by communities. Shreds of evidence of pesticide-related mortality abound in Nigeria's media space – with the latest case of 270 people dead in Benue State as a result of pesticide contamination in 2020.

Over 85% of smallholder women farmers do not use personal protective equipment (PPEs) in pesticide application, due to their unavailability and exorbitant prices. This is also the case for farm workers in corporate farms or contacts farming agreements who are mostly neither provided with the necessary PPEs and/or informed with their knowledge of pesticide risk by their employers/contractors/aggregators or agrochemical companies.

This is a violation of contractual laws and the right to occupational safety and health as derived from Nigeria's Constitutional right to life and safety. How should Nigeria react to the fact that most of the internationally banned pesticides used in Nigerian and many other developing countries are produced and exported by more developed countries in EU and Asia – who reject our food exports and are deliberately turning developing countries like ours into a dumping ground for their banned highly hazardous pesticides?

Agricultural training programs for farmers either by the government, agrochemical companies, private sector extension farm workers and/or international development partners are packed with techniques to enhance agro-mechanisation, use of genetically engineered seeds,

improve safety in the application of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, but largely fail to give farmers and trainee a full knowledge of the dangers and consequences of pesticide hazards.

The full disclosure of the consequences of wrong application of pesticide and its impact on the environment would most likely cause more responsible use of pesticides or better shift towards more nature friendly and safer pest control methods and inputs like use of biopesticides, nature pest control methods, and fairly mild pesticide brands.

The use and dependence on Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHP) and monoculture is a huge threat to Nigeria's food sovereignty and security because pesticides linger in the soil for years or decades after they are applied; harming soil health continually and forcing farmers to depend more on Genetically Modified Seeds (GMO), synthetic agro fertilisers and pesticides, all imported as local indigenous plant species and biodiversity are lost from monoculture and pesticide-based farm systems. The implication of this is a threat to the country's future food production capacities – her food sovereignty.

Despite the mounting negative human health and environmental impacts of the high use of pesticides, Nigeria still lacks dedicated pesticide legislation that protects Nigerians and clarifies the regulatory structure and process for pesticide registration and regulation in Nigeria. Government agricultural support programmes for farmers and budget appropriations continue to favour chemical agricultural inputs, and

international agrochemical companies and their local affiliates press to ease pesticide trade and use in the country.

Farmers associations and the wider public are largely unaware of the consequences of the high usage of pesticides on their health, environment, culture, food security, and the economy. Access to and knowledge of alternatives to chemical pesticides such as agroecology and organic inputs remain very limited in the country.

The list of banned pesticides by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) is outdated and is now under review for updating. The VMAP department of NAFDAC is making a striding effort to improve regulations on pesticides and improve access to information but is confronted with implementation challenges.

Similar efforts are being made by relevant government agencies like FISS-Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) to stop the entry of banned pesticides, increase sensitization on pesticides, seek alternatives to HHPs and improve local production of pesticides, just like the Federal Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry, who is now engaging agrochemical companies on the need to shift towards the production of products that are safe for Nigerians and also give Nigerians agro-exporters the leverage to take advantage of the shifting global food market.

What measures should be explored to improve pesticide regulation and awareness in Nigeria to ensure that farmers, consumers, local and online markets, associations, cooperatives, labour unions, financial institutions

and future farmers–youths are well informed, guided in their consumption, taking advocacy actions and get protected and access redress and justice from the use of banned and highly hazardous pesticides in Nigeria?

To ensure that agrochemical companies, pesticide lobbyists and promoters are not putting profits before Nigerian lives, and selling the false narrative of pesticide safety through sponsored research, lack of disclosure on pesticide risk, and biased legislative proposals, what should be the role of legislatures, social influencers, consumer protecting agencies, owners of market platforms and spaces, farmers and consumer cooperatives and regulators in the pesticide debate and trade?

These questions and more should inform our policy actions stemming from the relevant ministries, departments and agencies. The answers to these questions should reflect in the choice of pesticide brands promoted and given to Nigerian farmers by the Central Bank Farmers Anchor Borrowers Program, the farmers associations in the country, the consumer protection agencies and groups, as well as private farmers.

There is another way to deliver safer, nature friendly and more sustainable food – our fathers know this and recent experiences of successes across Nigeria suggest its scalable – agroecology.

Ofoegbu is Lead Coordinator Alliance for Action on Pesticide in Nigeria (AAPN)

EYE'S WORLD

With **Henrietta Gonzuk**

Living

By **EUGENIA ABU**

Who will rescue our men?

I had jocularly told one of my gorgeous daughters to quit being ridiculous and go and get married. We all fell about laughing. Having just come through the mandatory youth service, my girls and I are always having interesting conversations about the future. So, who is the man I would say and they would all laugh heartily and tease me and my spouse instead. Okay, so how did you meet daddy, all manners of jokes and jabs.

Anyhow on this day, they told me 'hmmm, mummy good men are far and few between. Most of the ones walking around are either into Yahoo or are too self-entitled or are doing self-adulation podcasts'. It was a joke but I saved it up in the recesses of my brain.

On another day they wanted to know how their Dad had proposed and on another how I knew he was the one. But it's hard to explain to young people today that the way that courtship took place in our time was totally different.

In fact, I explained to my daughters that generations before my Dad, the men would farm for their in-laws' family before they could take their daughter as wife. They would laugh. It was funny to them as it was funny to me when my mom told me.

But they translated to symbols, virtues and values. In a nutshell, it is all about valour, hardwork and dedication to family. A man brought home the bacon, protected his family and was in charge. Those things still hold true but clearly it is a much more complex world.

Remember to tell your son, brother, husband that you love him today. It is not easy for our men

Today men are in a complex field where women hitherto unseen are also in the mix. A lot of men are pressured to succeed and psychiatrists are telling us they are not coping that well anymore. Men are less resilient and more vulnerable and the Internet has worsened the situation where men are displaying wealth and intimidating ordinary hardworking young men. A lot of the bugatti and ferrari are hired to make a loud presence online and many



young men and I daresay women as well paying for a slice of a parked private jet to pretend they have arrived.

People without a dime are showing off online and giving the impression that they will be rich till they die. The pop culture, music, songs, movies promote get rich quick syndrome; get rich or die trying. The rap culture of drugs, feuds, diamonds, girls and fast culture imported from America is not helping matters. So our men are doing all they can to impress the girls whose newest mantra is have the dough or don't talk to me.

If you really do like a girl and you want to impress then you can rob a bank to make it happen. If that is dangerous then try and win an election and be the man. To be there and get there, you now are ready to do anything so you do not as they say chop breakfast.

All of this fast paced life is having a toll on the young men whose thoughts are slowly translating into hard work does not pay. To get the soft things of life they erroneously believe, you need to live fast, live large and live on the edge.

In between all of this, if the stress is getting to them, they are advised to use something to calm them down and another to perk them up. The fancy and eternally damning drug life would have begun. Our men today are between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Parents need to keep an eye on our boys and find the balance. Generally, fathers expect too much. It is not the same world and wives want to have babies abroad, where are they to get the money? Living like the Joneses helps no family. Living within your means is the Answer. There is the issue of school fees now and the men are under pressure to place children in kindergartens requesting two million naira.

Question is why do you want to imitate Ismail or Kingsley. Stay in your lane. The number of men falling off the wagon due to insane pressure is astronomical. Then they are not as resilient as their forebears in things of the heart, things of finance, things of disagreement.

Life generally gives them a tough time. They don't manage. And sadly we are hearing of suicides and

double deaths as in the case of the policeman who took his life and that of his girlfriend's life in Ogun state. So sad! A fully married man. He just could not put it all together. And in between all of this, there is a thriving gutter juice market in Lagos.

Yes, a juice of boiled marijuana, blackcurrant juice and other illicit drugs sold in jerry cans by regular women on the streets and bought in the dozens by working class men and some young turks. The scene as I read from The Nation newspapers one afternoon is armageddon personified. Drugs, sleaze, prostitution, madams keeping 14 year olds for the kill. Mindless young men are destroyed on the altar of trying too hard and then getting lost in the maze. Were it not better that they farmed for their inlaws?

Decent hotels are now crawling with young men with deep pocket scamming companies and individuals on the computers and living large. Their cars fast, their girls cheap, their hotel rooms

expensive, their trousers halfway between their bums and their knees. They certainly don't fit the hotels. Hair dirty, nails black, silly looking colourful shirts, illicit, fraud and drug money talking. It's a sad world we live in.

Where are the good men with values and valour, sharp with hard work and smart brains? Who would rescue our men slowly disappearing in the rabbit hole? It's not helping that women are strong, earn strong And are ready to get to the finish line, head held high.

Let us teach our boys the values we hold dear. We need money but money is not everything and quick and illicit ones lead you down another hole. Let us teach them resilience, the power of family, faith, kindness, and ethical competitiveness. Let us teach them to respect women. Misogyny is everywhere.

And as we go to the polls, let us do right by voting right. Remember to tell your son, brother, or husband that you love him today. It is not easy for our men. Hold them up for our collective tomorrow. Too many depressed men, full of anxiety. Chin up. I see you. Be strong, it is going to be alright.



THE NIGERIA STANDARD

With **Henrietta Gonzuk**

Health

Nutritional health value of dates

DATES are dry soft fruits with a sweet and delicious taste, which come from the date palm trees that grow in the desert.

Date palm is among the most ancient fruit trees that have been growing in the Middle East and the Indus valley for thousands of years. It was considered as the staple food for people living in those areas. Date palm was later introduced to different parts of the world starting from South East Asia, Northern Africa, Spain, Italy, and Mexico, and then to the United States during the 18th century.

Dates are of endless varieties. It can be classified as soft, semi-soft and dry dates. Like other fruits, dates are also seasonal products and therefore, the supply of fresh dates is always limited. Dates can also be used as 'survival food' on long trips or on hiking as it contains lots of nutrients, which boost the energy level, and it is easy to carry and ready to eat.

Health Benefits of Dates

- **Helps in Weight Loss:** Dates are rich in dietary fiber that free us from cholesterol and contain very low fat that results in weight loss. It also helps in keeping weight at a normal and balanced level for diet conscious people.
- **Prevents Digestive Problems:** Fresh dates are soft and easily digestible. It helps improve your digestive system, as it contains soluble and insoluble fibers and different types of amino acids.
- **Keeps your Heart Healthy:** Dates have high levels of potassium and low levels of sodium that helps keep your heart and nervous system healthy.
- **Prevents Anemia:** The high iron content in the fruit is beneficial for those suffering from anemia and boosts the amount of iron in their blood.
- **Reduces Constipation:** Dates are a healthy laxative food item that can prevent chronic constipation. Soaking dates overnight in water and having it with water reduces constipation.
- **Cures Eyesight Problem:** It helps improve your eyesight and reduces the chances of getting night blindness.
- **Energy Booster:** Dates contain natural sugars like glucose, sucrose and fructose that help in boosting your energy level. It has low



calories and it is very suitable for health conscious people.

- **Strengthens Bones:** Dates strengthen your bones and keeps them healthy because they contain selenium, manganese, copper and magnesium.

- **Relieves from Intoxication:** Dates are commonly used as a remedy to cure alcoholic intoxication. You can soak dates overnight and have them next day to prevent from severe hangovers.

- **Allergies:** Dates contain organic sulfur that helps in reducing allergies in general and seasonal allergies.

- **Diarrhea:** Ripe dates contain a high amount of Potassium that is effective in preventing diarrhea.

- **Healthy Pregnancy:** Dates are rich in iron, so consuming the fruit by the pregnant mother can protect the mother and the baby from anemia. It also prevents several problems such as bloatedness, bowel pain and intestinal difficulties that occur in women during pregnancy. It improves the uterus muscles and smoothens the passage during delivery. It also prevents hemorrhage soon after childbirth.

- **Healthy Hair:** Want to have healthy hair? Dates are rich in iron content that promotes healthy circulation of blood flow to your scalp thereby helping healthy hair growth.

- **Makes your Skin Look Younger:** Looking for quick tips for a natural face pack? Well, date fruit is the new face pack. First, take 5-10 pieces of fresh dates and add half a lemon or orange to it. Remove the seeds and grind the dates along with lemon or orange till it turns thick like a paste. Before applying, wash your face with cold water and then apply. You can splash your face lightly with

water to prevent the pack from drying up. Leave the pack for 10-15 minutes and wash your face with cold water. Use a towel and

wipe your face dry. Try out dates face pack for instant glowing skin.

Source: Medical news



Editorial

Lessons learnt from gubernatorial elections

ON March 18, 2023, the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC), conducted the gubernatorial and state Houses of Assembly elections. Unlike the Presidential and National Assembly polls, voter apathy reared its ugly head which was made worse by the lack of cash in circulation. The cashless policy had helped greatly in reducing the capacity of politicians to induce voters and helped in ensuring the conduct of a free, fair Presidential and National Assembly elections. Despite the continued scarcity of fuel and money, citizens' participation was impressive as many people traveled to vote candidates of their choice.

INDEED, INEC deserves commendation for the noticeable improvement in the management of the gubernatorial election process by its staff and field partners. The much-acclaimed BVAS machine that was touted as the game changer also added value to the process unlike during the presidential elections.

THAT INEC showed resilience and worked for the reconfiguration of the BVAS machine which performed far better than during the presidential elections showed that INEC wanted improvement. Accreditation and voting started early in most polling centers, unlike what was witnessed in the presidential polls. Prof. Mahmoud Yakubu and his staff must be commended for justifying the resources and excellent manpower expended on the 2023 election.

TO ensure adequate delivery of proper law and security enforcement, police officers and civil defence operatives were satisfactorily mobilised for the task; as was other security agencies needed to keep the law and allow citizens voted in a tranquil atmosphere. Security operatives were disciplined enough not to be partisan but to deter miscreants from fermenting trouble at the polls. Even though little skirmishes were witnessed in some areas.

WE commend INEC and the political parties for conducting themselves in an orderly manner. As a matter of fact, the 2023 general election was an all-important one in deciding the future of our dear country and state. We are also happy that all the stakeholders in the elections—INEC, political parties, security agencies, CSOs, and the voting public— all showed enthusiasm in making the gubernatorial elections a success to build the state.

AND also, the timely arrival of materials, improved functionality of technology made voting easier leading to the avoidance of late voting for the electorate-and quick action against electoral violence.

NIGERIANS being aware of the power of their voices and votes ensured the triumph of the people's power. This is the time for Nigerians to be calm, orderly and circumspect. Election is a means to an end and should not be taken as a matter of life and death. All hands must be on deck for the common good.

WE would also like to call on legal teams representing politicians to rise above the narrow interests of their clients or the pecuniary benefits of their services as they pursue the course of justice. They should put on the moral armour of sagacious thinking, courage and a sense of the public good. This is the time to think Nigeria. We call on citizens to be calm and go about their normal life peacefully. All these demand sacrifice, patience and persistence of all.

Corruption is a phenomenon all over the world and what it does is stopping the natural growth of countries or regions. That is why it is also known as an all-pervading circumstance and unnecessary hindrance for countries that are striving to move forward.

Today, no country is immune to the malaise as corruption. All and e very country takes part in it involuntarily because that is the key to progress and development and hence people see power as the opportunity to acquire wealth which they end up degrading themselves and run in the wrong direction. There may be a difference in the amount of corruption in all the countries, but it exists all the same.

Public life, personal life, politics, administration, education, and even research and security is also not immune to corruption. There is hardly any exception. Corruption is seen as a detestable act that must be punished in some countries, but that is not the case in India, as there is no specific punishment for any corruption. Corruption is an offence that does not ruin lives but ruin families as well because once a

Illegal processing of meat and its health effects

Sir, I want to use this medium of Nigeria Standard Newspaper to appeal to the Federal Government to renovate Abattoir market and also create an agency that will be responsible for monitoring activities carried out in Abattoir market during meat processing.

As someone residing at Abattoir and keenly watching the unfolding of activities in the market, individuals that are processing meat for commercial purposes do not maintain good hygiene.

The indiscriminate dumping of refuse within the market square calls for great concern. Cleanliness of the place and the processing method needs to be given due attention to avoid any outbreak of diseases that will put the lives of consumers at risk.

The use of tyres to burn hairs from animals' skin is another disturbing phenomenon that must be discouraged because the tyres contain harmful chemicals that if consumed would be detrimental to human health.

I wish to use this opportunity to draw the attention of the government to make efforts towards renovating the abattoir to make the environment suitable for such transactions. Essentially, the drainage system within the market and available water should be provided to improve the sanitary condition of the place. Waste dumps are very essential in such a place for proper collection of waste for safe disposal to designated places to prevent the presence of swamps or flies on products that people will buy



Government should intensify the anti-corruption war

person gets habituated to it, no one but themselves can stop them from it.

I therefore call on relevant authority to intensify the fight against corruption which is the bane of our country's awkwardness. The

fight against corruption will enable the public to enjoy efficient and available service delivery from those in charge of public offices.

Sunday Mercy Alandi
ECWA Church Angwan Clinic,
Tudun Wada, Jos.

oversee the activities of Nigerian markets through close supervision that will attract sanctions on erring members. The bottom line is that human health should be prioritized and never taken for granted. Everyone has a right to healthy living and not to endanger the lives of people by buying contaminated food items in such shabby places.

I therefore call on Nigerians to be s too where we carry out our daily

disciplined to do the needful to maintain integrity. Let's ensure proper disposal of waste not just at the market environment but at residential areas too where we carry out our daily activities. It is important to note that health is wealth.

Ngot Bwehmas Caleb is an IT student from the Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, Department of Mass Communication.

Parents should be role models in the society

SOCIETY nowadays is fast losing grounds in respect to the decline in moral values either to indiscipline or negligence on the part of some parents towards ensure how they have relinquished their roles of impacting positive values within their families.

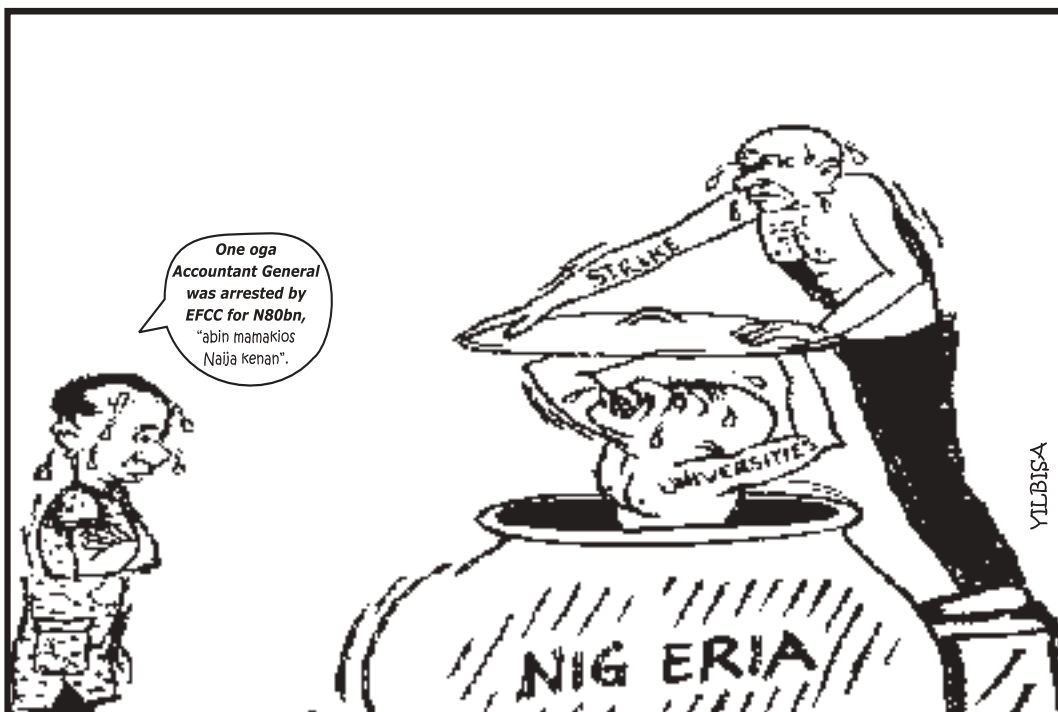
The negative tendencies being witnessed across the society demonstrates the fact that young people are growing without the necessary guidance and certain behaviours that are not desirable in a progressive society despite the rich cultural and traditional values including the ones inherent in our teachings either in the Christian or Islamic faiths.

It is on record that crimes such as armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping, terrorism and even

prostitution have been associated with young Nigerians who ought to be in schools or should be seen to be involved in doing something worthwhile or learning how to make decent living and not allowed to stray way into evil acts.

Young people should therefore by now inculcate the spirit of using their God given skills to add value to themselves and the society rather than becoming liabilities to the society. Parents have the greater responsibilities of being role models to their children by demonstrating those attributes of hard work, self discipline and the fear of God so that their own children can follow their footsteps in life.

By Mu'azu Adam Hudu is IT student from Federal Polytechnic Bauchi.



Opinion

Nigerians: Smiling in pains and crunch

By Sampson Uhuegbu

FOR the past one month, Nigerians had been thrown into restlessness, following the introduction of the cashless policy by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) governor, Godwin Emefiele.

To many, it is an unprecedented policy that had never been witnessed before. Although, the Apex bank informed Nigerians about the phase-out of the old 200, 500 and 1000 Naira notes and its plan to redesign new ones. Their plan has held sway. Few are comfortable with the idea; while many had kicked against it, but thank goodness, the N200 became legal tender as graciously approved by President Muhammadu Buhari, through his live broadcast on electronic media.

Before the just-concluded February 25th Presidential and National Assembly polls, it was rumoured that Emefiele's clandestine initiative was mainly targeted at checkmating votes-buying by some suspected political party candidates in the race. This was globally commended.

This essence of curbing the purchase of vote casts was still not defeated because "Naira" rained heavily during the exercise. The APC, PDP and LP and party's Campaign Committee members have begun to trade blame over who marred electoral processes with irregularities. The present challenges now are complex. CBN came up with a good brainchild but it should have organised itself well to avert the current crunch that had befallen the

It has never been easy for many Nigerians irrespective of status. This condition has continued to paralyse the daily activities of

Government and non-governmental organisations. Traders are finding it uneasy, hence their businesses have crumbled because there is no cash in the system.

The Union, Guarantee Trust, First, Access, Diamond, United Bank of Africa, Zenith, Heritage, First City Monument, Wema, Sterling and Stanbic IBTC banks were reported to have been experiencing a dearth of cash from the Central Bank. This development has frustrated many Nigerians as they could no longer have access to their money. This is pathetic!

It is not funny, at all. Recently, a middle-aged lady visited a Point Of Service (POS) to withdraw Two Thousand Naira (N2,000) from her account, but the operator charged her Six Hundred (N600). The poor-looking damsel was pleading with the man to deduct N400 charge and give her N1,600, but the POS owner refused. This forced the lady to burst into tears. "This Two Thousand is the only money that I had in my bank account", she cried.

This is really touching. One can see the pains Nigerian citizens have been subjected to by the policy. Pregnant women, nursing mothers, the aged, the sick and people living with disabilities have reacted to this excruciating pain meted on them over the unconsidered policy by the apex bank.

The recent pronouncement of President Muhammadu Buhari over the usage of the old N200 notes has never added any meaningful impact to this effect. Nigerians have appealed to the Federal Government to reverse it.

The Central Bank of Nigeria has a good idea, but failed to execute it professionally so that it would not

be harsh or subject the citizens to hardship. Perhaps, Emefiele had been under the apron of the Presidency. He is being remoted to do or not do. Ordinarily, the Governor of an apex financial institution exercises his strong power without interference except for the President to some extent.

To say here that the Nigerian currency is regaining its value should not be an avenue to massage the ego of Mr Emefiele. It had been the anticipation of Nigerians to see that the legal tender is not devalued.

One could see that there are blessings in disguise about the current crunch. The kidnapping rate that had ravaged the country reduced since the introduction of the "CBN mismanaged cashless policy. The reason is that the abductors can no longer have access to the heavy amounts of funds being paid to them as ransom in order to free their victims.

The glory should be ascribed unto the CBN over this good news. That had been the dream of Nigerians under the administration of the President, Muhammadu Buhari, who on assumption of office, pledged to tackle insecurity.

President Muhammadu Buhari's silence over this crisis his subjects are facing cannot be deemed as proper. He ought to have addressed Nigerians on what to do as there is palpable confusion beclouding the whole situation about the old Naira notes being rejected by Nigerians.

The crunch has heightened tension in the country. Residents of all the States, have, by this development, been thrown into untold hardship over non-dispensation of cash by banks even as old currency notes issued to

customers are being rejected by traders, transporters, filling stations, commercial drivers and corporate establishments.

It was learnt that those who received old N500 and N1000 notes from the banks have been thrown into confusion as they now run from pillar to pole with the currency notes looking for how to spend it even when the Apex bank said it has not ordered it should be issued to customers.

Sadly, This has forced banks to shut down operations, thereby making customers scramble for cash withdrawals just for their daily upkeep, which might have been negatively effected as a result of the system.

It has been discovered that traders have resorted to selling bulks of cash they make on daily basis to the neighbouring Point of Sale (POS) operators, who in return, re-sell them to their targeted general public, who need cash for their businesses.

Premises of banks these days are no longer besieged by cash seekers, as the present Naira crunch has diverted the attention of many to the services of the Point of Sale (POS) operators.

Even yesterday, the premises of banks located along the major areas of Owerri, were not much flooded by "cash seekers" as the present Naira crunch has diverted attention to the street service providers of financial transactions.

Frantic efforts made to get more reactions from some banks officials proved abortive as they were mindful of their comments over the current issue of Naira scarcity, but there are indications that they are short of cash as they issued old currency and worn-out fifty naira (N50) notes to customers.

It has been alleged that high-

class POS operators and those in higher positions now liaise with bank managers to smuggle out the much-sought cash.

A businessman in Owerri, Emeka Nwosu, regretted that he has experienced a huge loss over the CBN, saying his business is being crumbled by the cash crunch.

"For some time now, I have been finding it uneasy to meet up with this ugly development. It is adversely affecting my business. I pay Thirty Thousand to withdraw One Hundred Thousand Naira from the POS operator", he said.

It has also been alleged, that customers who throng into the banking halls immediately after the entry doors are opened by the security men, are said to be fomenting trouble and causing commotion even after being pre-informed of the non-availability of cash by Staff.

Although, A Staff of one the of first-generation banks in Nigeria, while addressing its mammoth customers that had besieged premises for various transactions, had pleaded with them to be patient over the cash crunch.

Nigerians are weeping as it stands now. Millions of bank customers can no longer have access to their hard-earned money. This President of the Federal Republic, The Senate and the House of Representatives committee chairmen of Finance and Currency kept their mouths shut.

The reasons for these scarcities cannot be said to have been made known to the general public. If one may ask, What is going on? Even if the CBN does not have cash, the presidency should seek funds in order to quotation the pains of Nigerians.

National unity, prejudices, and the consequence of anger

By FREDRICK NWABUFO

WHAT some of those battering one another on the amphitheatres of ethnicity may not know is that the Yoruba and the Igbo are of the same ethnic phylum.

I condemn the violence, voter intimidation and harassment across the 31 states in the governorship elections. And I plead with all Nigerians to submit to peace and unity to build our nation and a brighter future for everyone.

Anger is a barren human emotion, vacant of logic, rhyme, and reason. It is the stuff of that uncritical, unthinking, and irrational section of the human interior. Anger does not follow thought, and thought does not follow anger.

Anger is the mitochondrion of the "mobs." Sadly, this anger is misplaced, misdirected and mis-catalysed. The animus seems inspired by primordial schmalz and not anything altruistic. Anger of whose chief aim is to exact vengeance cannot change society but bring doom upon it.

I have been overwhelmed by concern over the heightened tension foisted on the nation partly by the declarations, imprudence, and miscues of two sides of the mob. There are always two sides to bigotry. Particularly concerning is the tension among Nigerians who have lived together in harmony for decades in Lagos State.

First, it is bad politics for anyone, particularly a non-native to make "taking over Lagos" a refrain. "We'll take over Lagos" – is bad sloganeering. It is revolting, and naturally will provoke resistance. I believe the same resistance will be compelled if non-natives of Anambra, for

instance, say they want to change the political order in the state.

The duelling mobs have been dutiful with divisive propaganda, which now appears to be pitting Nigerians against one another. Tired and enraging motifs like "No man's land" have been reintroduced into the public discourse. But Lagos, clearly, has aboriginal owners. It is the territorial heritage of the Yoruba.

This is distressing rhetoric, really. Lagos is a melting pot of cultures and people. It has been welcoming and accommodating to everyone. It is depressing that this lodestar among states is the subject of vicious barbs and back talks. The real wealth of Lagos is its diversity. It is essential that Nigerians cognise this fact and protect the peace and sanity of the state.

The bottom line is, we must be sensitive to Nigeria's unity, peace, and harmony. "One Nigeria" is not vacant of meaning. It must mean something to us. We must imbibe it, and it should reflect in our thinking, in what we say and do. Is what we are saying promoting peace, unity, and facilitating the healing of all Nigerians or is it deepening strife and tension?

Second, it is important that Nigerians understand that the factotums of the brawling mobs do not represent any group. These are half-witted individuals who lack knowledge of history, direction, and are constipated by anger. Let it be clear that they do not represent any ethnic group.

Third, it is dangerous and unacceptable to profile any Nigerian citizen for whatever reason. We are all Nigerians with mutually guaranteed rights under the constitution. We must make a departure from the old ways of reasoning and interrogating issues. There is a need for us to discard

prejudices and put Nigeria's unity and Nigerians first in whatever we say and do.

I was among the very few writers who spoke against the profiling of the Fulani, when speaking out earned you excommunication and cancellation, and if you come from my part of the country, a death sentence. In fact, the detained leader of IPOB did a broadcast calling for my beheading.

The bottom line is, we must be sensitive to Nigeria's unity, peace, and harmony. "One Nigeria" is not vacant of meaning. It must mean something to us. We must imbibe it, and it should reflect in our thinking, in what we say and do. Is what we are saying promoting peace, unity, and facilitating the healing of all Nigerians or is it deepening strife and tension?

We must understand the intricacies of governance and diversity and should not in any way become vectors of the social media contagion or soundboard for the noise, hate and prejudices of that ungoverned space. Nigeria is in our hands. The healing we all seek and the unity we all seek begin with every word we say.

Fourth, Nigerians must be mindful of the sort of rhetoric they promote. We cannot build a country on mutual hostilities. Hate and prejudice are the thoroughfare to Rwanda. It is troubling that the injudiciousness of the sparring mobs has dissolved into ethnic recriminations.

What some of those battering one another on the amphitheatres of ethnicity may not know is that the Yoruba and the Igbo are of the same ethnic phylum. Renowned scholars and historians like Adiele Afigbo and Samuel Johnson established this kinship which colonial politics of divide and conquer submerged.

What some of those battering one another

on the amphitheatres of ethnicity may not know is that the Yoruba and the Igbo are of the same ethnic phylum. Renowned scholars and historians like Adiele Afigbo and Samuel Johnson established this kinship which colonial politics of divide and conquer submerged.

As I wrote in "Do the Igbo and Yoruba know they are sons of Oduduwa," the two groups have had established trade-links dating to the period before contact with the first Europeans. And they are known to share passion for industry; are convivial, accommodating and peace loving.

Also, there is no documented history of war between the Igbo and the Yoruba, despite occupying the same "southern hemisphere". In the precolonial times, wars among kingdoms and natives were common, but there is no recorded incident of battle between the clans and kingdoms of the two groups.

In language, they are both of the Kwa-group Niger-Congo origin. The similarities between the Yoruba and the Igbo language are remarkable, if not uncanny, which point to an identical fount. We are too connected to be divided.

I condemn the violence, voter intimidation and harassment across the 31 states in the governorship elections. And I plead with all Nigerians to submit to peace and unity to build our nation and a brighter future for everyone.

Fredrick Nwabufu aka Mr OneNigeria is a media executive.

Feature

Did Obi win presidential election?

Since 26 February till date, Peter Gregory Obi has been shuffling his shoulders in a feat that suggests that he has something up his sleeves. He has spoken, cried, agonised, lamented and gnashed his teeth, to convey his poisoned emotions about the presidential election. Before the election, most of the polls were understandably pro-Obi; because some of them were his silent sponsors. write Kassim Afegbua

Relying on those skewed pollsters, Obi was confident he would defeat his opponents in the election. I had faulted the pollsters, accusing some of them of being economical with the truth. They concentrated Obi's winning demographics in the South-East, South-South, and North-Central. They reasoned that Atiku would win in the North, and Tinubu would win in the South-West. They failed to reckon the presence of the APC Governors as being powerful in their respective states; there were twenty one of them. Obi's supporters during campaigns were more than there were during the election. A lot of them had no voter's cards. They were just enjoying the fanfare of a new narrative in town, that could absorb their desires and pressures. So, Peter Obi's razzmatazz before the election was a deliberate strategy to dominate the media, especially the social media. His lieutenants used the skills of abuse and insults to confront anyone via social media, who wasn't on Obi's radar.

Obi may have won in twelve states in the election, but he didn't deserve those votes. The votes from his South-East states were suspect, dubious and unconvincing. They were without a doubt, falsely generated to shore up votes, to level up with areas where they envisaged he would suffer a shortfall and deficit, because he had no control of those areas. The percentage of attendance recorded in the South-Eastern states were contradictory to the realities that dominated public discourse before the election: IPOB was not predisposed to election conduct in the South-East, the unwholesome activities of unknown gunmen had turned the South-East into a theatre of war with cakes of crimson. It was a frightful reality that painted an ugly picture of a geopolitical zone whose economy had been badly affected by intermittent warfare and several stay-at-home orders, the rivers of blood in the South-East and the number of INEC offices that were burnt on a regular basis created apathy for the election; going into that election with such subcurrent was in itself a bad omen for a zone that has long yearned for presidency. Blood after blood, it was an atmosphere of suspense, fear, killings, and arson; such were the visible tell-tales of the zone. If that was a strategy to chase other contestants away, it may then be said that it has amounted to Peter Obi swimming in the pool of blood of those who were killed, so as to birth his presidency. I don't think that would sit well in his consciousness.

Again, the outcome of the votes



Obi

in the South-East did not reflect the reality we were familiar with. It is abstruse to think that elections were conducted in a seemingly calm atmosphere in that same zone that had always been soaked in contestation, disputations and killings. Considering also that the South-East had been PDP's stronghold before now, and Obi's involvement in the election was expected to take the shine off PDP's chart, such landslide victory is curious. Some of the results sheets had one and the same signature running through all the columns, some others had the same handwriting all through, while others had all other parties with zero votes except the Labour Party; I will call those votes allocated votes. Intimidation, gunshooting, ballot box snatching and voter suppression were all part of the deliberate acts to steer the votes in Obi's direction. Surprisingly, none of those has become a topic for discussion, in trying to analyse the general outlook of the election. One hardly hears anyone talk about the malpractices in the South-East. All one hears is INEC's inability to post results using its iREV facility. If all political parties had the expected number of agents, as they should have, the complaint about the non-use of iREV would not have gained traction; because all party agents had the results at the polling units; so, get the actual

outcome of the voting exercise was easy for political parties with the required number of agents. On Sunday 26 February, the day after the election, we were already jubilating in the Tinubu camp knowing he had won the election.

For me, Obi put up a good showing, but not enough to upstage the propitiousness for the APC and place power on his lap. His participation altered a lot of permutations, and the flow of politics across the country. Many upsets were recorded as a result of the Peter Obi factor; a factor that was propelled by youthful following. The youth showed that they want a paradigm shift from the old order and saw Obi as a breath of fresh air. His sense of organisation was tacky, and the party's ability to spread its message of hope across the country was impaired; first by leadership crisis, and secondly by its lack of the right calibre of persons to manage its opportunities. Also, Peter Obi was detained by his ethnocentric concentration and his pro-Christian campaign focus. He was a regular visitor in churches and places where the Christian population commands attention. Even in some parts of the North, he deployed his Igbo brothers as coordinators. The spread of his electoral votes is suggestive of the Igbo and Christian demographics spread in Nigeria-useful information for statisticians I guess. Adamawa,

Taraba, Gombe, Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Niger, and part of Kogi showed much support for him from the Christian populated areas. He suffered rejection in the core Northern states where the Christian population is scanty: Jigawa, Katsina, Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Borno, Yobe and parts of Bauchi states. Whatever he gained in the South-East was knocked off by his poor outing in those Northern states. As I mentioned last week, Peter Obi's presidency was anchored on ethnicity and pro-Christian sentiments, and was further attenuated by Tinubu's muslim-muslim ticket. Atiku's presidency was anchored on the belief that with two formidable Southern candidates, he would have a smooth ride in the North, while Tinubu's presidency was anchored on a pan-Nigeria orientation; the reason why his votes, were spread across all other geopolitical zones, except the South-east.

Even, if Peter Obi is gifted an extra one million votes, he wouldn't still meet Asiwaju's threshold. One million votes in an election, is like winning three states in a ratio of 300k, 300k and 400k votes, while others are presumably scoring zero. Even with a such generous electoral gratuity, Peter Obi would still not have a claim to victory. So can someone please help me explain this to him in his dialect for better understanding. I am annoyed by

Peter Obi's claim to victory, in an election he has so badly condemned. Is he trying to profit from a process which in his opinion does not meet the statutory requirements of law, or is he feeling that declaring him president-elect would eliminate all the "infractions" he has earlier identified. Does it not appear that Obi is trying to be clever by half? From the outcome of the election, does it not appear so convincingly that INEC had complied with the law substantially? Where is this Obi's victory claim deriving its impetus? If the votes from the South-East are subjected to forensic examination, does Obi not think that the chicken will come home to roost? How come Obi is not complaining about the outcome in the South-East, but looking elsewhere? Is that another name for smartness or glossing over what favours his quest? These and many more unanswered questions will form part of the narrative at the Tribunal.

Peter Obi must choose between being a patriot and a spoiler. It was convenient for him to celebrate when he defeated Asiwaju Tinubu in Lagos, but finds it faulty that he was beaten in some other places. He must quickly wake up from his dreamland to the stark reality of his defeat instead of wasting precious time keeping his supporters in suspense. He should congratulate the winner of the election, set a new tone to play constructive opposition, retool his Labour Party with a more vibrant leadership that can actively play the role of credible opposition, while preparing for another day. If he turns around to congratulate the winner, after the tribunal, it will not resonate with the aplomb of being a good sportsman. No election can truly meet the criteria for perfection the world over. Despite envisaged imperfections, nations move ahead through reforms and constructive engagement to deepen the process and make it more responsive to the challenges in the system. Nigeria's democracy is barely twenty four years old and still undergoing its own challenges. Through citizen's participation, mobilisation and conscientization, the likelihood to have a more robust electoral process will some day dominate the reality of our electoral system. Peter Obi still has age on his side, and can recontest in future elections if he so desires. He must help the country to grow in the right direction and not be part of a process that may likely throw up violence to hurt an already fragile system. He should behave like a good Christian. For me, Peter Obi did not win 2023 presidential election, he couldn't have won; and the earlier he realised that, the better for his

News

Group pledges support for Tinubu/Shettima administration

THE Lobito Group for Asiwaju, a Yobe State support group has pledged its support for the incoming administration of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Kashim Shettima, President and Vice President-elect. This was contained in a statement by Engr. Mustapha Maihaja, Director of Campaign Planning of the Tinubu/Shettima Presidential Campaign Council, while receiving the youth wing of the support group in Abuja. Maihaja who is also the patron of the group, commended the determination and zeal of the eight young men who took it upon themselves to embark on a solidarity walk from Nguru, Yobe State to



Tinubu

Abuja just to show their love, solidarity, support and happiness for the success of Asiwaju and

Kashim in the 2023 polls. He also called on Nigerians to join the group in celebrating the victory of an amazon in Africa.

From **ABBAS GUNGURA, Bauchi**

BAUCHI State Governor Senator Bala Abdulkadir Mohammed, has won his re-election for the second term in office as Executive Governor of the state in the just concluded governorship polls where PDP had an advantage over APC in the Saturday 18 Governorship polls

Governor Bala Mohammed of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) scored 525,280 votes to beat his closest rival, Sadique Baba Abubakar of the All Progressive Congress (APC) who polled 432,272 votes while Senator Haliru Dauda Jika, of the New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP) placed third with 60,496 votes.

Announcing the results, the Bauchi State Governorship election Returning Officer, Professor Abdulkarim Sabo Mohammed, VC Federal University, Dutse, Jigawa, said of the 2,749,268 registered voters in the state, only 1,0,58,381 were accredited.

Prof. Abdulkarim explained that out of the 1,0,58,381

Governor Mohammed wins re-election bid



Mohammed

voters accredited, 1,0,49600 valid votes were cast while 15,221 votes were rejected. Declaring the winner, Prof. Abdulkarim said "By the power conferred on me by the Electoral Act and as the Chief Collation and Returning Officer of the 2023 Gubernatorial election in Bauchi State, I Prof. Abdulkarim Sabo Mohammed, hereby declare that Senator Bala Mohammed of PDP having scored the highest number of votes cast is hereby declared elected". That Mohammed Bala of the PDP having satisfied the requirement of the law, is hereby returned elected".

UNICEF tasks FG on WASH services

From **Abbas Gungura, Bauchi**

FOLLOWING the world leaders and relevant organizations conference for the UN 2023 Water Conference, UNICEF Nigeria has called on Nigeria's Government to urgently intervene to end water crisis in the country.

The call was contained in a statement signed Dr. Jane Bevan, UNICEF Nigeria Chief of WASH and made available to journalists in Bauchi on Monday 20th March 2023 by the Communication Officer of UNICEF Bauchi Field office, in preparation for commemorating World Water Day today 22nd of March globally. According to a new UNICEF analysis, 78 million children in Nigeria are at the highest risk from a convergence of three water-related threats – inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); related diseases; and climate hazards.

The statement further explained that in Nigeria, one-third of the children do not have access to at least basic water at home, and two-thirds do not have basic sanitation services. Hand hygiene is also limited, with three-quarters of children unable to wash their hands due to lack

of water and soap at home. As a result, Nigeria is one of the 10th countries carrying the heaviest burden of child deaths from diseases caused by inadequate WASH, such as diarrhoeal diseases. It unfolded that Nigeria tops second out of 163 countries globally with the highest risk of exposure to climate and environmental threats. Groundwater levels are also dropping, requiring some communities to dig wells twice as deep as just a decade ago. At the same time, rainfall has become more erratic and intense, leading to floods that contaminate scarce water supplies.

"I believe we need to rapidly scale-up investment in the sector, including from global climate financing, strengthen climate resilience in the WASH sector and communities, increase effective and accountable systems, coordination, and capacities to provide water and sanitation services, and implement the UN-Water SDG6 Global Acceleration Framework.

"If we continue at the current pace, it will take 16 years to achieve access to safe water for all in Nigeria. We cannot wait that long, and the time to move quickly is now. Investing in climate-resilient water, sanitation, and hygiene

services is not only a matter of protecting children's health today, but also ensuring a

sustainable future for generations to come", Dr. Jane Bevan concluded.

'My re-election is the will of God'

From **Abbas Gungura, Bauchi**

declared winner of the March 18, 2023 Governorship Poll by INEC. He expressed appreciation for being honoured by the mandate given to him by the electorate for the second term and pledged commitment to consolidate on the successes recorded during his first tenure.

The re-elected governor extended hand of

THE re-elected Governor of Bauchi State, Senator Bala Abdulkadir Mohammed, has associated his re-election success to the will of God and a collective struggle by the good people of Bauchi State whose interest to develop the state overshadows their personal aggrandizement. Governor Bala Mohammed made this known while addressing journalists in Bauchi after being

sportsmanship to those who lost the election to support his administration's move toward transforming the state.

Governor Bala solicited for forgiveness from those he offended during his electioneering campaign. And added that it's now time to face serious government business.

The Nigeria Standard newspaper reports that hundreds of supporters

took to the street of the Bauchi metropolis to celebrate the victory of Governor Bala Mohammed'.

The male and female supporters who were playing different political songs and dancing in jubilation carried the governor's billboards and posters while others were seen celebrating and chanting "Bauchi na Kaura ne".

PDP suspects plot to subvert Taraba guber polls

From **Victor Gai, Jalingo**

THE People's Democratic Party, (PDP), has lamented over the delay in declaring Lt. Col. Agbu Kefas of the PDP as winner of the governorship election in Taraba State by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The state Publicity Secretary of the party, Andeta'rang Iramae, alongside other PDP supporters besieged the INEC office on Monday where they lamented that the

INEC State Collation/Returning Officer and Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) have no reason to delay the announcement of Lt. Col. Agbu Kefas as the winner of the governorship election having won with landslide, scoring a total of

255,317 votes.

According to Iramae, any attempt to tamper with the result will be resisted.

He said: "We are here to defend our votes, so INEC should not delay to declare result because the PDP candidate, Lt. Col. Agbu Kefas won the election".

He revealed how the officials treated one particular local government area unfairly while showing favour to others.

"By the Electoral Law, the results are declared at ward level, from ward level to local government level.

"Let me give you an instance, Wukari local government area had election. Results were declared at ward level and collated at local government level. The results came yesterday and were submitted. He was told to stay aside. He stood aside. After him,

Gassol came, they collected the result. Jalingo came after him, they collected his result. Ibi came after him, they collected his result.

"He came in the morning and the Returning Officer told him to step aside. What for? Because an agent of the party brought up issues that were inconsequential. He listened to him and tried to breach the process. You can imagine that!

"The Returning Officer of Wukari said, 'I was here since yesterday, I came before Gassol. People raised issues about Gassol's result, you went ahead and collected the result. I would not step aside'. You see it is ridiculous. As a party we are not comfortable," Iramae added.

The PDP supporters added that the INEC state Returning Officer should

announce the results as collated and any party not satisfied with it should go to the Election Petition Tribunal and challenge the result as the INEC National Chairman, Yakubu Mahmood did during the collation of Presidential Election on February 25.

The PDP supporters also accused the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) Umar Muktar Gajiram and the INEC State Collation/Returning Officer, Prof. Muhammed Ahmad Abdulaziz for taking sides with Prof. Sani Yahaya of the NNPP and interference with the final announcement of the Taraba State governorship result won by Col. Agbu Kefas of the PDP.

He warned that any attempt to disrupt the announcement of the result may lead to anarchy.

Features

Towards inclusive 2023 general election in Nigeria

THE 2023 general elections which started February 25 has gone beyond mere counting of votes and entered the level of litigation. One of the cardinal duties of the media, aside being the watchdog of the society, is to counter disinformation and guide the citizens to make informed decision in times of elections.

This, nonetheless, does not preclude its duty of upholding the right to freedom of expression of every electorate.

The media, among other actors, have a major role to play in ensuring that electorates decide their fate through active participation in a process that would bring a desired change.

Unarguably, inclusion of women, youth, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) at all levels of these processes is very important.

This is with special emphasis to decision making, policy formulation and execution. However, this group of persons has continued to be marginalised and hardly given the needed opportunities to make their voices heard by the media.

Poor inclusiveness

A research by the Institute for Media and Society (IMS) between November 2022 and January 2023 on inclusive election coverage on radio and television towards 2023 showed that broadcast media coverage on inclusive electoral process was poor.

For instance, in terms of thematic focus on women, youths/PWDs and the featuring persons from these groups as guests or sources on political programmes, revealed a decline when compared with a similar study carried out in 2019.

The research sampled a total of 17 radio stations and 15 television stations across the six geopolitical zones of the country.

Addressing the imbalance

To change this narrative and improve the mainstreaming women, youths and PWDs in the electoral process through improve inclusive media coverage, IMS, recently organised a two-day workshop for journalists across the nation in Abuja.

The workshop was supported by the European Union Support To Democratic Governance in Nigeria, (EU-SDGN) Programme II and had as its theme: 'Sharing on Good Practices and Trends on Inclusive Coverage of the Electoral Process'.



Yakubu

According to Dr Akin Akingbulu, who is the executive director IMS, the training was aimed at refocusing the media to give quality attention to inclusive participation in the 2023 electoral process.

"A democracy without inclusion is a democracy with deficit. Therefore, the way inclusion is being handled in Nigeria is nothing to write home about. We want to change the landscape and we want the media to give more quality attention to the issue of inclusion.

"From the baseline report, the media has not been giving visibility; sufficient access to women, youths and PWDs and this is a duty for the media. "So we want to change all that and to do that we need to build the capacity of the journalists across all the platforms.

"This is to enable them engage the public; citizens, institutions, with appropriate education such that participation of these groups would improve in the electoral process and broader democratic governance in Nigeria," he said.

Sharing a similar sentiment, the institute's programme manager, Timothy Bamidele said the EU SDGN programme II, would foster a friendly and all-participatory democratic process in the country. Bamidele said EU SDGN II for

media support was meant to address the challenges media practitioners face in the coverage of inclusiveness during the electoral process.

Also speaking, Prof Abigail Ogwezzy-Ndisika, lecturer, Department of Mass Communications, University of Lagos, canvassed deepened professionalism in the coverage of the under-served.

Ogwezzy-Ndisik, said though the coverage had not reached expected levels, with interventions such as EU SDGN II, there is hope that things could improve in the years ahead.

Participants responses

According to Dr Ganiyat Tijani-Adenle of Lagos State University, it is important that all participants at the workshop practice what they learnt.

"If you are not constantly reminding yourself about your responsibility, you might slide out. The take home for me is the awareness-creation and the determination to implement all the knowledge gained and shared," Tijani-Adenle said.

"I have learnt many new ways to report and present programmes on inclusiveness about women, PWDs and youths.

"I am currently doing a programme on women and youth inclusiveness in politic. So coming here has given me

a different perspective and equipped me with new ways of reporting issues surrounding inclusiveness.

"In terms of carrying out my reportage and in the presentation of my programmes on inclusive electoral process and good governance, I am better equipped. "So it will go a long way in shaping me and also educate other media practitioners in my station about what I have learnt," said Mr Ango Ballyhoo of Invicta FM, Kaduna, For Hannah Akanta from Radio Nigeria, Yola, the training was very engaging.

"It has been an engaging moment, been enlightening and has been an eye opener for me to understand more

about inclusiveness coverage. "To be frank, I have not really had the opportunity to attend such trainings and presentations on such topic. The two day training has added to my knowledge about inclusiveness.

"Moving forward as a reporter, I will deliberately implement all that I have learnt in other for us to have an inclusive electoral coverage and reportage. "I will be intentional about coming up with programmes that address the issue of women, youths and persons with disabilities", Akanta said.

To Blessing Oladunjoye, a journalist with BONews, Lagos, journalists must be deliberate about covering persons with disabilities, women and youths as the country goes to the polls on Feb, 25 and March 11.

"Journalists should strategise and share tasks among themselves while covering elctions, while media organisations need to allocate specific reporters to cover the marginalised groups as they make preparation to cover the voting process.

"Media houses should also collaborate with associations working with PWDs to get more insightful reports for their stories", Oladunjoye said.

Chigozie Chukwuleta of Unizik FM, Awka, also charged other participants to make effective use of the training.

As Nigeria gears up towards another general election, it is important that all stakeholders contribute their quota to ensure that nobody is left behind in the process. NAN

Be that as it may, it is still early doors for the 25-year-old whose progress in Spain should be observed throughout 22-23.

"The workshop was supported by the European Union Support To Democratic Governance in Nigeria, (EU-SDGN) Programme II and had as its theme: 'Sharing on Good Practices and Trends on Inclusive Coverage of the Electoral Process'. According to Dr Akin Akingbulu, who is the executive director IMS, the training was aimed at refocusing the media to give quality attention to inclusive participation in the 2023 electoral process."

Water scarcity and health hazard



By VICTOR ALI

WATER is life, goes a very popular saying: This cannot be distant from the truth. "No homo sapiens and even animals and other things can survive without the usage of water. It is an inescapable necessity for human existence.

Its multi-purpose usage is legendary we need water to

bath, we need water to wash our dirty cloths we need water to cook, we even need water to wash our cars and fill the water tanks.

Of recent, Jos city and its environs have been enmeshed with water scarcity. Virtually, all the communities in Jos have been witnessing unprecedented, severely biting water scarcity. People cannot properly undertake their domestic chores because of scarcity of this very "essential commodity". While being austere with the usage of water, if available at all some domestic chores are left undone.

Needless to say, water vendors nay water tankers have now taken the centre stage, in the provision of this necessity. Apart from makng brisks business, the water vendors have become lords onto themselves. An ugly incident was averted recently in one community in Jos.

The story goes thus: A desperate person who was desirous of water to cook his meal came across a water vendor to buy. The water vendor reported that the water was not available. Angered by the reply from the water vendor while he was seeing jericans full of water, the man lost his temper and was ready for fist-cuff.

It took the intervention of a passerby before the looming fight was aborted. Why the refusal to sell the water to the patronize? The water vendor dutifully reveals that, they said water had been booked. You find it funny and ridiculous? No, that was visibly the home truth because the water vendor saidhe was in business and if the water was not booked, he would have sold same and went back for another round of water supply. And what about the cost of the water, Hitherto, a 50 liters jericans of water in the said



community sold for twenty (25) to thirty (30) naira, has now lip-frog to fifty (50) naira and above. In the face of the economic hardship, the poor folks who can not afford this "exorbitant" costs have only one rescuer only water-the dirty river of streams in the neighborhood.

Though boreholes (with all the attendant effects on the earth surface) abound in some of these vicinities, water scarcity still persists. It is either the boreholes are malfunctioning or those being powered by NEPA (sorry, JED) are out of use as a result of the "usual" power outage. In spite of this, whenever the water is available at the borehole, it is the same typical story of the Nigerian shylock. Must sell at the same price like the known water vendors.

Indeed, apart from the boreholes, where those water vendors and the water tankerdrivers ferry their products' to the un suspecting consumers remain unknown. No kidding, yours sincerely, feeling thirty attempted to drink water in one household

at the neighbourhood, lo and behold, the

water smells. what about the rains? We are already at the twilight of April which by ordinary estimation, the heavens should have opened with bounteous rains. Alas, it has been some isolated cases of drizzling. The other day we were discussing with a friend on this precarious situation of water scarcity. What he offers was not hope but stark gloom. He asked me rhetorically. Don't you know that there is climate change? He said what used to be obtainable then, may not be feasible now.

With this scurry scenario of water scarcity, particularly in a densely populated city like Jos, the propensity of the outbreak of water borne diseases is high. The committant effect, sure would be monumental. Without having hospital records at one's disposal, one can say that, this water scarcity might have sent some innocent citizens to their early graves. May the good Lord help us all.

“It took the intervention of a passerby before the looming fight to finish was aborted. And why the refusal to sell the water to the patronize? The water vendor dutifully reveals that, they said water had been booked. You find it funny and ridiculous? No, that was visibly he was in business and if the water was not booked, he would have sold same and go back for another round of water supply.”



BY KENNETH DARENG

Mothers Day is considered as a very auspicious moment to celebrate the daily role of mothers in shaping not only the home front but also the society at large. It is indeed an occasion that calls for reflection on who a mother is.

If one is to ask every individual to narrate the story of his or her upbringing, 8 out of 10 would ascribe their success in life to their mothers. The fact remains that a typical Nigerian mother represent many things to different folks. These mothers may be married yet are sole bread winners, some are teenage mothers, some are widows, some are barren, while some are called mothers simply because they are married despite all forms of neglect, bitterness and frustration.

Some are barely hanging on in

failed marriages just for the sake of their children while some are afraid of the way society will look at them if they quit the institution called marriage. Unfortunately, many of them are suffering in silence from the hands of some mindless husbands who see nothing good about their wives no matter the effort and no matter the sacrifice put in by their spouses.

A good mother may be described as one who is God fearing, honest, faithful, patient, loyal, loving and caring among other virtues. Must often she is the Chief cook of the house whereby she ensures that the family meals are well prepared, sometimes she sacrifices her own portion incase the food wouldn't be enough to go round, she does not sleep if the children go to bed on empty stomach.

She is the teacher of the family who makes sure the children do their school home work. She is also the chief law officer who enforces disciplinary measures in case there is any breach of the house rules. A mother also serves as the Director of finance and supplies of the family by making sure financial expenditure and income is well appropriated while she also in most cases is the chaplain of the family who ensures that prayers

are observed. Don't forget she is the nursing mother of the home who makes sure no one in the family goes sick and above all, she plays the role of a mother to both the husband and the children while still stepping up her role in the other room just to keep body and soul together.

Looking closely at the bulk of our mothers in our present day Nigeria, one may not be wrong to say that our mothers in the villages and even in the urban centers are yet to find the desired respite particularly on the part of the illiterate ones whose day begins with toiling from morning to sunset just to make ends meet for their families. Nowadays women who are mothers are involved in menial jobs such as mason farming, stone crushing, taxi/keke driving house cleaning apart from those who are involved in petty trading in the market and so on.

Although mothers can be referred as the conscience of the family, here I am talking about mothers who will not abandoned their responsibilities and end up being mothers who are found hanging in brotels drinking, smoking and prostituting. And not mothers that would compromise moral standards to tolerate their children hanging out with bad company or those of them who chastise their wards for coming back home late at night or those mothers who will always call their children to order. Also, a good mother will not allow her children to become armed robbers, bandits, kidnappers and terrorists. Good mothers are not busy bodies who will destabilize peaceful homes and destroy relationships among relatives, friends and associates. What about mothers who roundly condemn abortions by their daughters because, such

negative aspects endangers the well-being of the family circle which a woman is expected to play a good motherly role for the moral rejuvenation of the family and indeed the society especially where the husbands are either absentee heads of household or are just sitting on the fence.

Today our mothers either dead or alive should be celebrated for their sacrifice, love and care. Some could not even live to see what the fruit of what their labour have become. But I owe them a debt of gratitude for raising us up in both good and bad times. Let those fond memories of our sweet mothers inspire us to greatness while we must in return take proper care of them as a matter of responsibility and good conscience. **SMS ONLY-kennethd1966@gmail.com. 08098181805**

Tribute to Nigerian mothers

“A good mother may be described as one who is God fearing, honest, faithful, patient, loyal, loving and caring among other virtues. Must often she is the Chief cook of the house whereby she ensures that the family meals are well prepared, sometimes she sacrifices her own portion incase the food wouldn't be enough to go round, she does not sleep if the children go to bed on empty stomach.”

By JIDAUNA DARING

THE relevance of cooperative as the name implies cannot be overemphasized since it remains an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspiration of its members through a jointly waned and democratically controlled enterprise as far as the members interest and savings are concerned.

However, in a quest to further educate members of cooperative societies on the Plateau, the leadership of Plateau State Cooperative Federation PLASCOFED thought it very expedient to organize a one day training workshop for over 200 cooperators who were drawn from different organizations and in the state.

This important event took place at Institute of Mining and Geo-Sciences hall, JMDB junction, Tudun-Wada Jos, Plateau State, recently.

Speaking on the theme: "Understanding the principles, values, rights and privileges of members in a cooperative society", Mr. Nimmyel Timloh while doing justice to the mentioned topic said that the characteristic of a genuine cooperative can be identified as an autonomous body, free from government or external control and domination.

It is an association of persons not of capital. The interest of members must come first rather than capital; the group of persons is the social element.

Timtoh noted that other characteristics include the objective of the group which is to meet the member needs in the fields of economic, social and cultural aspirations. The benefits must be equitably shared base on contributions among others. He said that the values of cooperatives did not arise overnight, without roots, ancestry and intellectual antecedents. The cooperative movement is deeply rooted in social ideologies and religious belief system which have nurtured it for the past two centuries.

Mr. Timloh pointed out that the cooperatives values include self-help, equality, equity, democracy, solidarity, honesty, openness, caring for others and social responsibility.

He disclosed that the principles of cooperatives are open and voluntary membership, democratic membership control, members' economic participation, autonomy and independence, education training and information, among cooperatives and concern for community.

Worthy of note in his presentation were the rights and privileges of cooperative members which include; who is cooperative member, accepting the concept, understanding, financing, bye-law and regulations, voting power, business suggestions, attending all meetings, providing information and member's control.

Timloh explained that the management of organizations

where cooperative exist do not have the right what so ever to control the affairs of the society because it's an autonomous society that can only be controlled by the cooperatives EXCO who are duly elected by their members.

He encouraged cooperative members to key into buying of shares, and advised them to imbibe the spirit of financial self-

She said that such training would go a long way in educating its members on the importance of being a cooperative member. The president added that the training would also give the members of the cooperative an opportunity to contribute their quota in their respective cooperative societies.

Mrs. Mershak told the participants that the PLCOFED

PLASCOFED organizes training session for cooperators



Hannatu Mershak, PLASCOFED President

discipline. He urged them to save 50 percent of what they earn.

Timloh emphasized the need for the cooperative members to remain committed when it comes to servicing their loans so that the society would continue to progress from strength to strength.

He maintained that the participation of a member in cooperative activities is very important if the cooperative will experience any form of growth, adding that the need for members to fully exploit their God given talents and harness them towards economic development would definitely empower them to be self-reliant thereby reducing the poverty in the society.

Earlier in her remarks PLASCOFED President, Mrs Hanatu Paul Mershak expressed delight and thanked the participants for honouring the invitation. She encouraged unity amongst all members of cooperative societies in Plateau State.

Mrs. Mershak said that the essence of organizing the workshop for it members in the state was to come together to discuss issues that sometimes affect the smooth running of the cooperatives in different ways, adding that PLASCOFED is saddled with the responsibility of training the cooperative members from time to time.



PLASCOFED Board members



Nimmyel Timloh, one of the resource persons

board would not relent in its effort when it comes to protection and building the capacity of its members.

Also in his goodwill message, Director of cooperatives Plateau State, Mr. Ayuba Azi Commended PLASCOFED for organizing the workshop for its members and described it as very timely, looking at the present economic challenges being faced in the country.

Mr. Azi equally described members of the cooperative societies as potential leaders in their respective cooperatives. He told the participants to see their membership in the society beyond give and take, saying that the cooperatives help in transforming the lives of its

members in different ways within their family circles.

Some participants who spoke on behalf of others, thanked the organizers for organizing the workshop which has impacted a lot of knowledge on them and promised to step-down the

training to their members.

THE NIGERIA STANDARD reports that the workshop also featured another paper presentation on "response to drugs in a modern era" by Mr. Henry Ojenya, play-let, exercise and presentation of certificates to the participants.



Participants in group exercise at the training

IMAGES

Portraits of some Nigerian Governors-elect during the 2023 Governorship elections monitored by The Nigeria Standard Photo-Editor.



From left are, Makinde (Oyo, PDP), Sanwo-Olu (Lagos, APC), AbdulRazaq (Kwara, APC)



From Left are, Abiodun (Ogun, APC), Bumi (Yobe, APC), Kadda (Katsina, APC)



From left are, Sen. Sani Uba, (Kaduna, APC), Yahaya (Gombe, APC), Ono, (Akwa-Ibo, PDP)



From left are, Aliyu (Sokoto, APC), Barr. Caleb Mutfwang, (Plateau, PDP), Namadi (Jigawa, APC)



From left are, Edet Otu (Cross River, APC), Rt. Oborewori (Delta, PDP), Yusuf (Kano, NNPP)



From left are, Mohammed (Bauchi, PDP), Zulum (Borno, APC), Lawal (Zamfara, PDP)



From left are, Fr. Alia (Benue, APC), Sule (Nasarawa, APC), Siminalayi (Rivers, PDP)

Odd World

'My grand dad kept his real family hidden'

A woman has taken to Reddit to share how she discovered her granddad's deepest, darkest secret when taking an at-home DNA test - and says the truth has destroyed her entire family

Every family has its quirks - but they're usually harmless and nothing to worry about. However, one woman has revealed she uncovered her granddad's deepest, darkest secret when taking an at-home DNA test for fun.

She explained how she ordered testing kits for her household after they became popular - but instantly regretted it after the results came in. The woman said: "I did a home DNA testing kit. I then got kits for my siblings and my parents - and encouraged my cousins other family to do it. The test connected us with a couple of relatives that we didn't know we had."

But it turns out her 67-year-old granddad has an entire other family, who he has been keeping secret for at least 45 years.

"He is legally married to another woman and not my grandmother," she added. "They had a wedding but they are not legally married."

"He has a wife and a bunch of kids and grandkids with his other family. I don't know how he hid this for all this time."

She went on to explain how her granddad travels a lot for work - but they never would have thought he'd be the type of person to live a secret double life.

The woman added: "My grandmother is devastated. They have been 'married' for 45 years but when we

investigated the marriage was not real.

"None of us had a clue and now it's like our family was destroyed and so is his other family. I wish I could go back in time and not take that stupid test."

Destroyed by the truth, the woman has taken to Reddit to urge others against taking DNA kits, saying "some things are better left hidden".

Commenting on her post, one user said: "It's actually good that you found out now. The DNA test is a blessing in disguise."

All the latest news, showbiz, lifestyle and sports updates, brought to you by our dedicated American team.

"Your grandmother would have been blind sided from losing everything she thought belonged to her and your family that his legal family could inherit and take should your grandfather pass."

"Your grandma has time to protect herself and get a lawyer. Sorry your grandfather is a snake."

Another user added: "The truth usually comes out in one way or another. I wouldn't beat yourself up about doing the DNA tests."

"This allows your grandmother the opportunity to plan as she could have been left with nothing if grandfather died."

"You aren't responsible for the damage from other people's lies. This is a huge lie."

A third user said: "You are the other family. Granny needs to be protected legally now. She will be entitled to nothing."

Source: The Mirror



Her granddad has been living a secret double life for at least 45 years



Plateau politicians doing the unthinkable

SOME years back, one of my friends had an ample opportunity to represent his people as honorable councilor in one of the local government area in Plateau State. As God will have it, he was eventually voted the leader of the legislative arm of that particular council. My friend's unexpected rise to power at the grassroots was welcomed with great joy and happiness considering the traumatizing moments he had survived before his eventual victory at the polls.

We were witnesses to the suffering my friend had experienced in the past and had consistently prayed God to remember him no matter how little any such an office would offer him. So, when the Lord eventually upgraded our friend, our limitless joy superseded reasonable boundaries.

As we joined many of his relations in jubilation praying God for a successful tenure, I had cause to approach him one fateful day advising that since he was debuting on the political landscape, he would need all the prayers and publicity he can get to help boost his rising profile. As a journalist, I offered to provide him such service for free in my organization to help in my own little way possible. Many other friends of his also offered themselves to help in anyway possible to enable him succeed without much hiccups. I can still recall with great nostalgia, my friend's positive response and assurances of representing his constituents and doing us proud, a promise he intended against all odds to unflinchingly keep.

Unfortunately, nothing near such promises of his came to pass after his eventual inauguration and assumption of office. These anticipations did not come to fruition as my friend completely changed his color and turned deaf to our advice without any remorse.

I did not however notice these negative happenings immediately, at least not until a colleague drew my attention to the fact that our honorable councilor does not pick phone calls or respond to text messages anymore. Sooner than later, this same issue started proliferating within the constituency reemphasizing that the honorable councilor had since cultivated the habit of excommunicating himself even as his new found friends were either his legislative colleagues and or other prominent members of his political party hierarchy.

Just as the popular adage goes, 'wonders shall never end', I took it upon myself to confirm this sad and unfortunate story making the rounds which further confirmed that our councilor friend had become an acting big man. True to their words, my friend had for long changed color.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the local government council that year approved several car loans giving them the choice of choosing any luxury car, my friend went for the craziest. After totally forgetting where he was coming from, he threw discipline and good character to the wind. After all, it was basically a time for him to squander, eat, drink and forget all sorrows.

At the end, my friend's tenure came to an end and like a wild wind without any reasonable impact on his community. Throughout his entire tenure, he left his constituency stranded. Already, he had deserted his friends and there was no way he could re-step himself back to

them. For me, our umbilical cord had already been cut-off and relationship severed. Not too long after this, he had to park the car he could no longer manage even as his political colleagues and friends deserted him.

Though my friend is not the only individual fame had transformed to become a monster; it has always been quite a pity seeing such persons' tenure come to an end with nothing to show for it.

Within the life-span of my career; I have seen chairmen who successfully served their tenures, ending up completely broke and bankrupt with absolutely nothing to show for it. Yet, others coming after them have failed to learn any thought-provoking lessons from such experiences.

In the past decade, most Plateau politicians I have noticed lack this spirit of helping their vulnerable constituents. Many of them do not believe that helping others rather than their relations is fruitful. Therefore, it is becoming a tradition that when politicians on the Plateau are seeking for any public office, we see them begging for favors in a most astonishing humble manner, but once they win elections, their benevolence automatically becomes history.

In most cases, most Plateau politicians based on their character are one unique different set of people yet your sincerely to comprehend in life. Many of them think that they are wiser staying aloft from their anticipated social responsibilities, the truth however is that they are but foolish, selfish, greedy and unthankful to God for His blessings and watch over them. All said and done, it is still unthinkable that despite the high-profile public service holders and remarkable politicians which the state has continued to produce, not much has been achieved in our quest in moving an appreciable percentage of the citizenry out of abject and excruciating poverty. Unlike other states of the federation where politicians and top government officials find it all joy spending millions on educational sponsorship of the citizenry, most Plateau politicians are still ideologically imbedded in the philosophy of sharing stipends and drugs to its vulnerable youth ever ready to cause all sorts of mayhem and acts of calamity on innocent people.

Many of our politicians and political officeholders are never interested in the future of our children but only helping them significantly to become nuisance and menace to the society. Though Nigeria has had several decades of manageable democracy, not many are appreciative of that which our politicians have dished out as dividends of this civilian regime. Though our political leaders have continued to allocate humongous resources for developmental purposes, the resultant execution of most white elephant projects have been the order of the day.

Indeed, most of our rural areas are still left in an unimaginable deplorable condition. More than ninety percent of our rural occupants are impoverished beyond proportion even as our children are enveloped by drug related activities.

Here on the Plateau, this sad development is nothing much better as most areas are still lacking basic amenities. Our youths have been turned into political thugs by this same people we stood under the rains and sun to elect them into office. This same people who do not mean us well are basically interested in our votes and that which can better their bread and butter. These same friends and brothers of ours are the ones refusing to treat us as human beings.

Feature

Mubarak: Liberation from religious oppression in Nigeria

Irreligiosity is not a phenomenon that is often linked to the African continent. But in recent times things have started to change. The religious landscape is undergoing significant shifts and transformations. Despite the growing visibility of religion on the continent, irreligious individuals are becoming active. LEO IGWE writes.

THE case of Nigerian humanist, Mubarak Bala has made it necessary to reflect on the situation of atheism in Nigeria. It is imperative to examine how religious minds have demonized atheism and tyrannized the lives of nonbelievers.

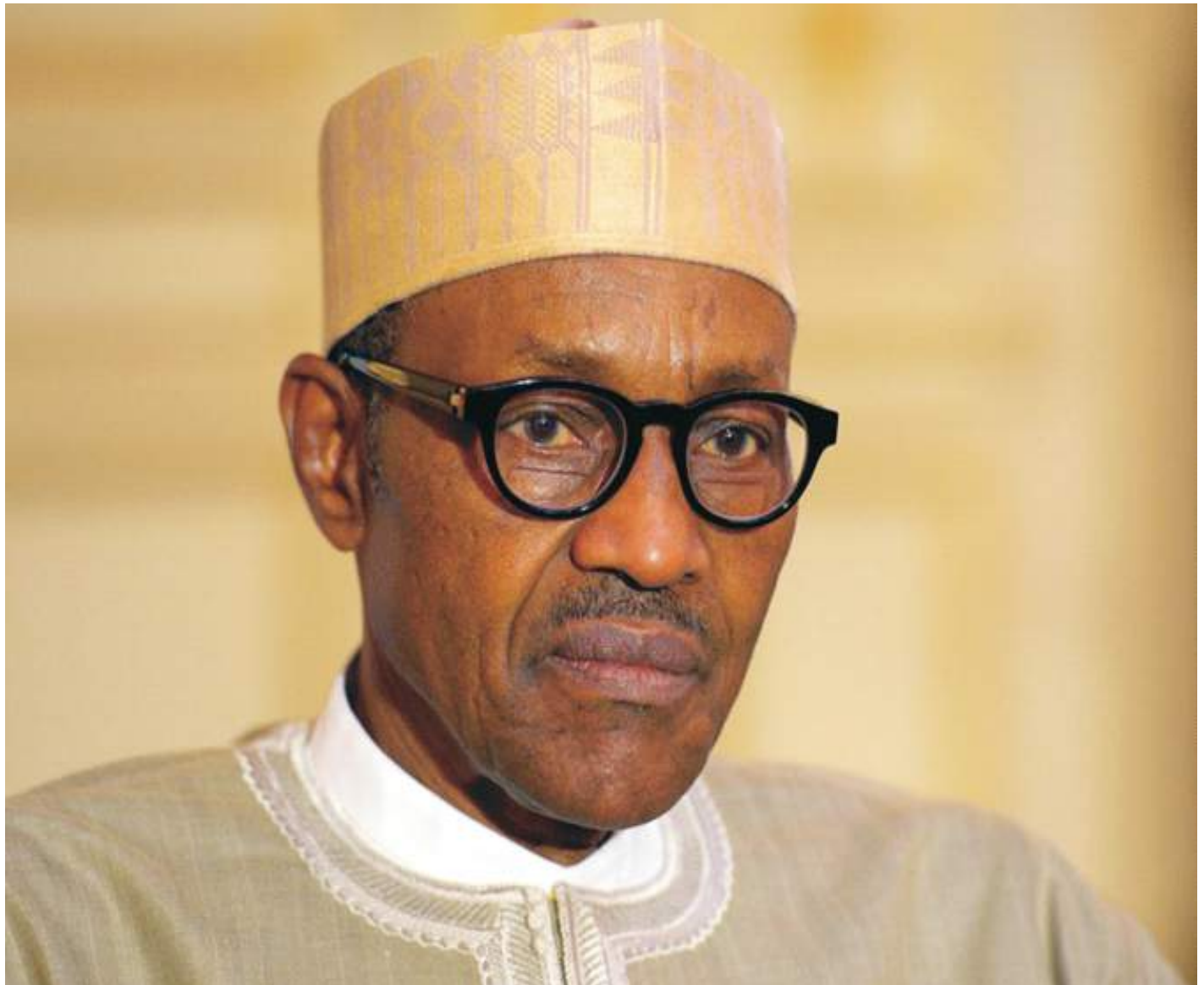
Irreligiosity is not a phenomenon that is often linked to the African continent. But in recent times things have started to change. The religious landscape is undergoing significant shifts and transformations. Despite the growing visibility of religion on the continent, irreligious individuals are becoming active.

Groups of nonbelievers are emerging and organizing. There is a need to explore the link between atheist activism and liberation, especially the liberation of nonreligious persons in Africa. It is in investigating this connection that efforts and actions by atheists and humanists to free themselves and society from religious bondage could better be understood. Such an exploration would situate initiatives by godless and faithless individuals to bring about social change and transformation.

Atheist activism has been misrepresented by pious minds and in pious scholarship. And in consequence, atheist assertiveness has largely been misunderstood and mischaracterized. Atheist activism is designated as militant, fundamentalist, and in some cases, Islamophobic. Nonbelief in religious gods, deities, and dogmas has been presented in the negative sense; as an 'antiestablishment' sentiment, a deviation from the norm, a violation of the sociopolitical order, an epitome of intellectual, or moral debauchery and deserving of suppression and repression.

Little attention has been paid to the notion that religious faiths encapsulate theologies of oppression, persecution, and marginalization. The god idea has become an epithet for dictatorship, a pretext to perpetrate heinous crimes and abuse. The name of Allah has been used to justify bloodletting, savagery, genocide, physical and structural violence, and other atrocities. Religions make absolute claims to knowledge, truth, power, and morality. Supernatural faiths do not countenance opposition and disputation. They are totalitarian. Faith groups maintain and strive to control to the minutest details the lives and actions of individuals and societies. Religions sanction socio-economic oppression and political subjugation of others, the religious and non-religious others.

The case of Mubarak Bala shows that misrepresentation of atheism is entrenched, and serves the cause of religious tyranny and despotism in Nigeria. Theocratic governments politicize mischaracterization of atheism to justify denial and erosion of irreligious liberties, violation of the humanity of atheists, the sanctification of impunity, as in the notion of holy war or jihad, and cruel and unjust treatment.



Buhari

This presentation focuses on two main weapons of religious oppression, apostasy, and blasphemy. It explains the actions taken by Bala to undo these oppressive mechanisms and further his freedom. I argue that atheists' assertion of their rights and liberties are not transgressions but an exercise in social, political, and economic liberation from religious oppression.

Bala came out as an ex-Muslim in 2014. Take note of the expression, 'came out. The profession of Islam is like being locked away in a room and prevented from leaving. Bala might have ditched Islam much earlier than 2014 but the hostage and antagonistic climate did not permit him to go open and public with his non-belief. As I was told, persons who are born into Muslim families are automatically Muslims. Born into an Islamic home, there is no option of choice to belong or not to belong.

One cannot decide not to be a Muslim. Once a Muslim always as a Muslim. One cannot leave or renounce the religion because abandoning Islam is a dishonor to the family and an offense against the Islamic state and community.

But apostasy is not an infraction in any way. It is a right. However, Muslims made it a violation of Islam. As a transgression, apostasy attracts heavy penalties:

ex-communication, banishment, honor killing, execution, or extrajudicial killing by nonstate Islamic actors. Thus it takes a lot of courage to renounce Islam, to scale the religious prison walls. Many who are unable to leave or escape this religious bondage resign to fate; they continue to pay lip service to the religion. They continue to identify as Muslims even when they are not. Many observe the teachings of Islam even when they think and believe otherwise. Simply put, Islamic faith holds its confessors and members captive.

To free himself from this social prison and mental hostage, Bala left Islam. He could not continue to deceive himself. He could no longer pretend to be a Muslim when he was not. More importantly, Bala found the teachings and practices of the religion objectionable, harmful, and incompatible with a reasoned outlook. He discovered that Islam as practiced was outdated, incompatible with human rights, and an improper moral guide to happy and meaningful living in this 21st century.

Bala's renunciation of Islam came at an enormous cost because Islamic gatekeepers put a heavy price on freedom, freethought, free speech, and free assembly. Islamic prison guards placed a price, the supreme price on liberty which many of its prisoners cannot afford to pay. In the case of Bala, he decided to bite the bullet. He

resolved to free himself. But his quest for freedom led to the severance of family ties. Relatives consigned him to a mental hospital where he was shackled and treated as a psychiatric patient. His family regarded his renunciation of Islam as a form of mental illness. They thought he must be out of his mind to leave or to contemplate leaving Islam. They took him to a state hospital for rehabilitation. The family wanted to cure him of apostasy so that he could regain his sanity and return to the Islamic faith.

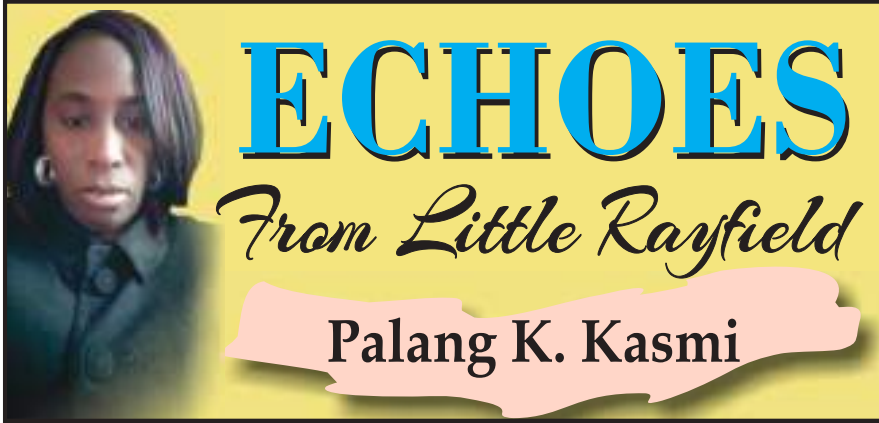
Bala escaped from the hospital and continued to live, identify and conduct himself as an apostate. In 2020, police arrested Bala for making some Facebook posts. Some Islamists claimed that the posts insulted their prophet and offended their religious sensibilities. One way that Muslims have tried to hold people hostage is to make a violation of their sensibilities an offense, a punishable infraction for other Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Meanwhile, nobody punishes Muslims for offending other religious and irreligious sentiments and sensibilities. Nobody penalizes the Islamic faithful for casting aspersions on non-Muslims and nonbelievers. Again, Bala refused to be caged or gagged. He continued to speak freely and express his thoughts and ideas about religions and their prophets. Of course, it was not for a long

time. After two years of incarceration, Islamic theocrats prosecuted and jailed him.

As the case of Mubarak Bala has shown, Islam has become an oppressive ideology, and a device to hold any real or imagined nonbelievers hostage. Atheist activism tries to undo the oppression and subjugation of infidels and other religious nonbelievers. Atheists in Africa are human beings and have equal rights. Atheists want to be free and to exercise their liberty like religious believers. But theocrats undermine this process of liberation and progressive emancipation. Atheists want to live in a society where people freely embrace, renounce or change their beliefs. But the religious establishment is opposed to freedom and equality of all and for all. Atheists want to live in an environment where individuals are free to say or write whatever they think about any religion or prophet. Religious tyrants loathe freethought and free expression. Early in this 21st century, atheist activism has become a liberation struggle against religious tyranny and totalitarianism.

Atheist activists have become freedom fighters, social, political, and intellectual liberators of Africa and Africans. Atheist activists have become awakers of Africa and Africans from religiously induced slumber, oppression and mental slavery



Palang K. Kasmi

Lalong eulogises Coach Mabo, coronates 3 Taroh chiefs

Before travelling to his hometown to participate in the March 18, 2023 gubernatorial and Houses of Assembly elections, Plateau Governor, Simon Bako Lalong last week undertook a working visit to Langtang south to continue with the presentation of staff of office to 3 traditional rulers in Taroh land. He had in a similar fashion like the ones he did in Wase, Mikang, and Shendam LGA's performed the Coronation and Presentation of 3rd Class Staff of office to 3 newly upgraded Chiefs on Thursday March 16, 2023, jointly held at the Palace of the Ponzhi Tarok in Langtang North Local Government.

Those crowned were their Royal Highnesses Ponzhi Bwarat, Compt. Ponfa Bahal Rtd (3rd Class), Ponzhi Gani Col. Dauda Nimyel Rtd. (3rd Class) and Ponzhi Timmwat, Hon. Nicholas Selbong Musa (3rd Class).

Lalong stressed that his actions is an affirmation of his administration's belief that the traditional Institution is key to the overall peace, harmony and development of the State even as he urged the new chiefs to discharge their duties with courage, dignity, fairness and justice.

"You will agree with me that the focus we have given the traditional institution and the honour we have accorded our Royal fathers has steered them to work hard for maintaining peace and security in their domains", he told the gathering.

"Such attention has also promoted harmony within our diverse ethnic groups who now feel a sense of Justice, Equity and Fairness unlike in the past where they felt neglected, marginalised and oppressed" the governor told the people as he performed the historic traditional rites in the presence of sons and daughters of the land, and Cultural Enthusiasts who were all gathered at the Ponzhi's Palace for the ceremony.

Long Gamai of Shendam and Vice Chairman of Plateau State Traditional Council Miskoom Martins Shaldas III, Ponzhi Zinni, Nimman Langnim, Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs Sylvanus Taggun and Chairman of Langtang LGA, Zulfa Rimven in their separate remarks could not hide their joy as they appreciated the Governor for the dignity being accorded the traditional Institution in the state.

Lalong equally assured traditional rulers of his desire to improve their welfare which has led him to sign into law the Plateau State Traditional Rulers Renumeration Bill 2020 to ensure challenges faced in running the institution is curtailed.

One of the newly installed Chiefs, Ponzhi Gani Dauda Nimyel who responded on behalf of the newly coronated Chiefs expressed deep gratitude to Governor Simon Lalong for the honour done them, pledging to ensure peace and stability in their domains.

After conducting the function, he journeyed to Shendam for the elections where he received a rousing welcome home by a mammoth crowd in the town.

The Governor cast his vote for the elections in company of his wife Regina at His polling unit in Nyak-Ajikamai Shendam.

Sadly, the state was thrown into mourning last week with the sad news of the demise of Jos Based

Popular Nigerian and international football icon Coach Ismaila Mabo. Lalong alongside some of his aides and government officials visited the deceased's family house in Jos, where he rained tributes on his great career moments as a football star, coach and mentor, having Played for the Mighty Jets Football Club of Jos, Super Eagles, Pioneer Coach of Super Falcons that led the female team to the Maiden Edition of the world cup in China and 2000 and 2004 Summer Olympic Games, including Board Chairman of Plateau Sports Council before his demise.

Lalong eulogised Mabo for building sports in Plateau and at the National and international level. Coach Mabo died in the early hours of Monday, March 13, 2023 at age 79 and was buried at the Zaria Road Burial Ground Jos



News

Female police triggers soldier/police clash

From VICTOR GAI, Jalingo

THERE was heightened tension around the INEC office, venue of governorship election results collation centre as personnel of the Nigerian Army and The Nigerian Police were engaged in a fierce exchange of gunfire that resulted in the death and injury of several personnel on both sides.

THE NIGERIA STANDARD learnt that a female police officer in mufti, while resuming duty at the INEC office on Monday morning was asked to produce her identity card for recognition. When she failed to cooperate, the soldiers assaulted her which attracted the attention of the police personnel on duty around that axis.

A fracas resulted which led to the two parties opening fire on each other which led to the instant death of one police personnel.

The clash which was accompanied by sporadic gunshots and tear gas led to the shutdown of business premises while people scamper back home for fear of the unexpected.

Initially, the incident was attributed to a post election violence which was quite anticipated as final collation of results were being awaited. But it turned out different.

A journalist who was on his way to the collation centre was caught up in the fracas. He told this reporter that some party faithful were trying to protest the already announced result which made the security forces act in order to avert a breakdown of law and order.

"Here is no go area for now. It is like there are mercenaries in town. We are hiding in one of the shops. Everywhere is closed now. There

are gunshots and tear gas all over," the journalist told this reporter.

Meanwhile, several innocent personnel of the Nigerian Police are feared dead with several injured in what seemed like a reprisal attack.

THE NIGERIA STANDARD was at the police headquarters in Jalingo to ascertain things. Several vehicles were riddled with bullet shots and their tyres punctured as a result. Some uniforms were seen with blood stains on them. Also, police personnel, mostly in mufti, were seen discussing the experience.

According to some of them, the soldiers raided the premises in armoured vehicles in reprisal of the earlier incident at the premises of the INEC office. They said they were caught unawares which resulted in a lot of casualties.

"I thought that was my end", stated an eyewitness, a food seller, Punarimam recounted her experience when the soldiers stormed the premises of the Police headquarters where her shop is located.

"I was at the shop. I heard some scuffle. They started around the INEC office. I was cooking and before I knew it, I heard sporadic shots. I ran and stumbled. I left my cooking. The shooting was too much and I thought that was my end.

"I called home and asked them to pray for me because I am not sure if I would be alive or not. I pleaded with everyone at home to forgive me if I have offended them.

"It is a thing to give thanks. I never expected a single policeman would come out alive. I was

surprised to see them alive," Punarimam revealed.

A joint team of the Police, army and the Department of State Security (DSS), has confirmed the killing of one police officer and the injury of three other personnel.

In a joint press briefing at the SSS headquarters in Jalingo, the Taraba State Commissioner of Police, Sulaiman Yusuf narrated what happened.

"The Commander 6th Brigade of the Nigerian Army and the Commissioner of Police, Taraba State command, regret the unfortunate incident that occurred this morning 20th March, 2023 which led to a clash between the personnel of both organizations in Jalingo.

"It was a minor disagreement that led to the escalation of the incident. This incident is a dent in the synergy and mutual trust both the army and the police in Taraba state has enjoyed.

"While assuring the citizens of Taraba State to go about their daily activities, the high command of both organizations have set up a joint investigation team to look into the root cause of the matter with a view to ensuring that erring personnel are brought to book," the Taraba State Commissioner of Police, stated.

He also assured that all efforts are still in place to support the ongoing electoral process and to see to its completion.

However, the ongoing collation of results for the governorship elections have been put on hold. Collation and announcement of results for the remaining six local government areas was supposed to commence by 11 am today but the latest incident may have put it

Health commissioner advocates regular eye checks

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

THE Kogi Commissioner for Health, Dr Zakari Usman, has advocated for regular eye screening to prevent the irreversible blindness caused by Glaucoma.

Usman gave the advice at a press briefing recently in Lokoja, as part of the ministry's activities to commemorate the World Glaucoma Week (WGW), with the theme: "The World Is Bright, Save Your Sight". The activities for the Glaucoma Week was organised by Kogi Ministry of Health through the Eye Care



Ehinare

Steering Committee in collaboration with Sight Savers International and other stakeholders.

According to Usman, the week is a unique initiative that puts a spotlight on glaucoma as the leading cause of preventable irreversible blindness worldwide.

"The week is designed to spread awareness and understanding about the importance of early detection of glaucoma.

"It is also an opportunity for me to inform the public about the good work that the government of His Excellency Alhaji Yahaya Bello, is doing to prevent the devastating effect of glaucoma for Kogi citizens," he said.

The commissioner defined Glaucoma as a disease that causes irreversible blindness as a result of increase in the tension in the eye (intraocular pressure).

"This causes an irreversible damage to the eye and eventually leads to blindness. glaucoma can be seen in any age group but is particularly more in people above the age of 40 years.

"The Nigerian blindness

survey revealed that the prevalence of blindness is 4.2 per cent in people above the age of 40 years, and of this, 16 per cent of them is attributable to glaucoma.

"One in every 200 people aged 40 years and above has glaucoma, and as the world ages, the population of people with glaucoma increases.

"This number is estimated to skyrocket in the coming years as over 100 million will be affected by Glaucoma worldwide by 2040," he said.

He noted that there was no cure for glaucoma, but blindness from glaucoma could be preventable if it was caught early and treated appropriately.

The doctor maintained that glaucoma remained the leading cause of preventable, irreversible blindness, but prompt diagnosis and treatment could prevent unnecessary loss of vision.

"Regular eye checks is the number one rule for vision preservation in glaucoma; the earlier it is diagnosed the less the damage it can do.

Sports

How dad's goal created 'two greatest players

The occasional weed is sprouting through the odd crack on the green concrete tennis court of the Graceville Uniting Church near Brisbane. RUSSELL FULLER writes.

A couple of miles away from the Queensland Tennis Centre, where world number one Iga Swiatek was among the names competing in January's United Cup, 14-year-old Liv Wood is testing her backhand against pace and spin.

Since my last meeting with the Brisbane-based family in 2018, that goal has changed.

Ray's eight-year-old daughter Paloma has chosen football instead.

But Liv - who took up tennis aged three - is still pursuing a career in the sport and in January competed in her first open professional tournament.

In recent years, Liv has turned her back on junior tennis in disillusionment at the cheating of players who call their own lines.

She has tried her hand at swimming and Australian Rules Football as tennis took a back seat for a while to guard against injury.

But she figured it would take a long time to get good at either of those sports. So it was time to step it up on the court.

"I'd love to go on to the tour," says Liv, who was midway through Australian former world number one Ash Barty's autobiography when we met.

"I know my dream is to become number one, and hopefully it comes true. But I'd love to go on the tour."

The Bayside Open in Redland Bay, with a total prize fund of 2,100 Australian dollars (£1,155), was the venue for Liv's first open professional tournament in January.

Three events into her fledgling career, against invariably older and far more experienced players, she is still searching for a first pay cheque.

But this is her future now. Her junior career is behind her, as Ray and the family decided when she was 12 that it was too stressful.

"I think there's a lot of pressure from a lot of the parents. The juniors call the lines themselves and unfortunately you do get a lot of very indifferent calls and it makes it not enjoyable for the kids who are genuine and do play by the rules," he explains.

"She's hitting with men and women. Don't get me wrong, she's being cleaned off the court some weekends by some really high-level male players but she more than holds her own against female players."

Liv admits "there were some challenging games" as she recalls her junior days.

"I got affected a little bit mentally and would sometimes come off the court crying," she said.

"The umpires would always decide with the other player, because it's always their call. You've got to be on to everything, and always be watching what the other player is doing."

Liv might have been competing and living in Spain by now if it had not been for the pandemic. Ray and his Australian wife Angela opted to stay in Brisbane, but Liv is expecting to spend up to eight weeks this year at the Catalunya Tennis Academy in Barcelona.

Liv only resumed her full tennis schedule in October - after an 18-month period in which she did just four to six hours a week to guard against overuse injury in puberty, and sapping enjoyment levels.

Ray was wary of the dangers from his experience in elite football, which includes spells at both Paris St-Germain and Leicester City.

"It looks like it's worked out well as



Liv Wood took up tennis at the age of three and this year competed in her first open professional tournament

she's come through the other end with no injuries," the 43-year-old says.

"She's five foot nine, five foot 10 maybe, and still growing. There's two girls we know of, who Liv's friends with.

"One went through a full shoulder reconstruction. One went through a wrist operation - and that's purely just for the amount of hours they are doing on the tennis court as their body is going through the change."

Liv added that "it was good to have a break".

"We were trying to get out of the routine of getting up for training every day," she said.

That routine changed further in January, when Liv enrolled at Kelvin Grove State School on a full tennis scholarship. At the expense of a couple of academic subjects, she is now able to train for about eight hours a week during the school day.

Ray has not coached Liv for many years, but was still picking up the balls in the training sessions I watched on a typically sunny and humid Brisbane day.

And at the age of eight, Paloma is now old enough to offer her older sister a piece of seasoned advice from the side of the court.

In Ray's original plan for his daughters - which ran to more than 100 pages - he was going to create two champion tennis players.

He maintains that over a 10 to 15-year period he could create a champion in any sport - but that you have to stay flexible.

"We gave her an opportunity to try tennis," Ray explains.

"We said to her you are going to have to choose a sport that you are maybe going to give a good go at and she chose football over tennis, and we were happy to support that."

"Now we have one tennis player, and one football player. And they will both play for England which is good,

so hopefully one will win a World Cup and the other will win a gold medal at the Olympics."

"You might as well buy a lottery ticket" was the way 18-time Grand Slam singles champion Martina Navratilova summed up Ray's dream when we discussed this last in 2018.

"Champions are born, and then they have to have the right environment to be made. Putting all the eggs into this one basket, it puts a lot of pressure on the kids," she added.

Ray's firm belief is that anyone can make it to the top.

"I've worked with boys who were 11 or 12 when I worked in the Premier League at Leicester City and a lot of people would say these boys are never going to get an opportunity because if Leicester need a player they'll just go and buy one.

"I've worked with players like Luke Thomas and Harvey Barnes - and if they can do it, then my daughter can do it and anyone's children can do it."

Ray says he remains confident Liv will make it on to the WTA Tour, and hopes Grand Slam titles will follow. But this was the first time in our three meetings I have heard him admit the story may not end in quite that way.

"I'm always a big fan of aiming as high as possible, and if you fall a bit short that might still be a good outcome," he says.

"I've never ever told Livi this, but I think for me just the opportunity to get a scholarship and travel overseas and study at a college, that would be still a superb outcome. There was a little bit of psychology behind it."

One of Liv's coaches in Brisbane is Glenn Moodie. Before the family

headed off for some lunch and an ice bath in between sessions, he drew parallels with Richard Williams.

"The consensus over here, without anyone knowing the ins and outs of it all, was that he was crazy," he says.

"But I always thought that he was trying to develop something for his kids where if they didn't make it they had a good work ethic, good morals and were developing good habits to succeed in whatever they plan to do."

"I always thought that was good provided they are not getting dragged on to the court. It's a bold plan but I think you have got to have one - I think you have to get there by design."

"From what I've seen, I feel like if she stays motivated and wants to do it for herself, Liv could be playing the Australian Open one day for sure."



Coach Glenn Moodie (left) believes Liv could play at a Grand Slam one day

Sports



Carlos Alcaraz became the youngest men's world number one when he won the US Open in September aged 19 years and four months

Alcaraz beats Medvedev in return to world best

CARLOS Alcaraz breezed into the tournament on the past Daniil Medvedev to win the Indian Wells title and return to world number one.

BBC SPORT said that, Spaniard Alcaraz, 19, needed only one hour 11 minutes to seal a 6-3 6-2 win that took him above Novak Djokovic at the top of the ATP rankings.

It is the US Open champion's third career Masters 1,000 title.

"It feels amazing to lift the trophy here, to recover the number one. I would say this has been the perfect tournament," Alcaraz said.

Djokovic was forced to withdraw from the tournament in California because he was unable to enter the United States because he is not vaccinated against Covid-19.

He will also miss this week's Miami Open, where Alcaraz is defending champion.

Alcaraz broke Russian Medvedev early in the opening set to open up a 3-0 lead and never looked like relinquishing his grip on the match.

He won the first 10 points of the second set to move into a 4-0 lead, before sealing victory without facing a break point.

"Daniil obviously didn't play at his best level, but I'm very happy for my performance and how I played this tournament," said Alcaraz.

"I expected a tougher match. Against him is always a tactic match, and I did perfect today. That's why it looks easy - but it wasn't."

Alcaraz is only the second player after compatriot Rafael Nadal to win at least three Masters 1,000 titles as a teenager.

He lost the world number one spot in January after Djokovic's triumph at the Australian Open, which Alcaraz missed because of injury.

He returned to action in February, winning the Argentina Open and reaching the final of the Rio Open.

Alcaraz must successfully defend his Miami Open title in order to stay at the top of the rankings.

Defeat was Medvedev's first in 19 matches, having come

into the tournament on the back of successive wins in Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai.

He struggled to cope with the windy conditions against Alcaraz and also appeared hampered by an ankle injury suffered in his fourth-round win over Alexander Zverev as well as a split thumb sustained in the quarter-finals against Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

"Why didn't I play my best? I don't know," said Medvedev.

"Maybe it was his ball. Maybe

it was the wind. The ankle, the thumb, the tennis, wind, whatever. But we almost made it. I will try to be better next time."

Nadal has dropped out of the world's top 10 for the first time since April 2005 - a run of 912 consecutive weeks.

The 36-year-old, who has slipped to 13th, has not played since injuring his left leg at the Australian Open, but is hoping to return on the clay of Monte Carlo next month.

Moore wins maiden PGA title



Tommy Fleetwood has six wins on the European Tour

TOMMY Fleetwood fell short of a maiden PGA Tour title again as Taylor Moore won the Valspar Championship.

BBC SPORT said that, England's Fleetwood, playing in his 112th PGA Tour event, trailed overnight leader Adam Schenk by one shot heading into the final round in Florida.

The 32-year-old carded a one-under round of 70 but American Moore shot a sublime four-under 67 to finish 10 under and claim his first PGA Tour win.

Schenk saw his 41-foot putt to force a play-off bounce off the lip.

He holed his bogey putt to take outright second, one stroke behind Moore, with Jordan Spieth finishing tied for third alongside Fleetwood a shot further back.

Moore, in his 46th PGA Tour start, had an anxious wait to see if anyone would match his score after setting the clubhouse lead with a fine round that featured five birdies and one bogey.

"It hasn't really hit me yet," Moore, 29, told NBC. "I was just in compete mode and just watching the guys finish,

maybe in a play-off, maybe not, and it's so cool.

"It's so awesome, it's what I work for and I'm really excited not just for me but for everyone around me. It's a cool moment."

Fleetwood, who has finished second four times on the PGA Tour, moved into a share of the lead with a birdie on the par-five 11th.

But a bogey on the 14th after he took two shots to get out of a greenside bunker effectively ended his chances of victory at Innisbrook Resort in Palm Harbor.

American Schenk had held either the outright or joint lead after each day and went into the final hole also on 10 under.

A wayward drive saw the ball come to rest close to the base of a tree, but the right-handed Schenk produced a superb left-handed shot with his club head inverted to give himself a chance of saving par.

After hitting his approach to 41 feet, his putt carried slightly too much speed as it hit the pin, then the lip and agonisingly ricocheted away.

ELENA Rybakina avenged her defeat in the Australian Open final by beating Aryna Sabalenka in straight sets to win the Indian Wells title.

BBC SPORT said that, After a 78-minute opening set, Kazakhstan's Wimbledon champion Rybakina went on to win 7-6 (13-11) 6-4 for her maiden WTA 1000 triumph.

It marks her first win over the world number two in five attempts.

In January, Belarusian Sabalenka beat Rybakina in three sets in Melbourne to win her first Grand Slam.

Sabalenka had dropped just one set en route to the Indian Wells final - her third this season - but under pressure from 10th seed Rybakina, the serving issues that plagued her last year returned as she hit 10 double faults in the first set alone.

Rybakina, who beat defending champion and world number one Iga Swiatek in the semi-finals, needed six set points - four of which were on her own serve - before she could edge ahead in a lengthy tie-break.

Rybakina beats Sabalenka to win women's title



Elena Rybakina will rise to seventh in the world rankings

The second set proved a considerably quicker affair, as Moscow-born Rybakina broke Sabalenka's serve to love in the first game.

After both players saw two break points apiece go begging, Rybakina went a double break up at 5-2 only for her opponent to break back in the next game.

But she served out the victory on her first match point and has risen to a career-high position

of seventh in the world rankings.

Rybakina, who missed out on 2,000 ranking points for her Wimbledon triumph last year after the tournament was punished for banning Russian and Belarusian players, says "the biggest goal" is to be number one in the world.

In the men's final, Spanish top seed Carlos Alcaraz beat Russia's Daniil Medvedev 6-3 6-2.

Lee wins first event in eight years

NEW Zealand's Danny Lee won a four-man play-off at LIV Golf's Tucson event for his first tournament victory in eight years and \$4m (£3.2m) prize money.

BBC SPORT said that, Lee, 32, who joined the Saudi Arabian-funded tour last month, had last won at the 2015 PGA Tour Greenbrier Classic.

A two-under-par 69 put him at nine under and tied with Mexico's Carlos Ortiz and South African's Brendan Steele and Louis Oosthuizen in Arizona.

Lee sealed victory with a 25ft birdie putt on the third play-off hole.

"Last win I had was also a four-man play-off," said Lee, whose winning putt from off the green clattered into the flagstick before dropping in the hole.

after a closing round of 67.

coincidence, I don't know. But it feels pretty amazing right now.

"I just felt like winning is just not my thing, but [this] just changed that. It's just good to see I'm capable of playing some good golf again."

Lee, who won \$15.3m in 303 PGA Tour events over a decade, has now won a quarter of that amount in six rounds at LIV Golf, having also picked up \$125,000 for his Iron Heads GC quartet coming third in the team standings.

Fireballs GC, captained by Sergio Garcia, won the overall team competition.



Danny Lee has previously competed on the PGA Tour

Sports



Super Eagles Head Coach, Jose Peseiro (second right), Finidi George (right) and other members of the technical crew sharing ideas before an international friendly against Ecuador...last year.

PFAN set for battle with NFF over Shorunmu, Finidi's 'sack'

THE Professional Footballers Association of Nigeria (PFAN) may clash with the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) following the 'sack' of Super Eagles' assistant coaches, Finidi George and goalkeepers' trainer, Ike Shorunmu. The duo were barred from Super Eagles' camp, allegedly, on the request of head coach, Jose Peseiro, as the team prepares for Friday's 2023 African Cup of Nations qualifier against Guinea Bissau at the MKO Stadium, Abuja. The NFF, has however, denied the sack saying: "As part of cost-cutting measures instituted at the beginning of the new administration, we established a rotation policy among the assistant coaches, based on the high number, which was agreed with all of them. The last time that the team had a programme, Mr. Finidi George was the person who travelled for the friendly

match in Portugal. This rotation policy is only for matches. When there is a tournament, all of them will be with the team." The Federation claimed that Finidi knew he would not be in the team for the games against Guinea Bissau, saying that the current trip is for Usman Abdallah. "The other person, who could have been contending, Mr. Salisu Yusuf, has been sent to the U23 team. There was no victimisation, sleight of hand or any disrespect meant to our illustrious ex-international players. "The case of goalkeepers' trainer, Ike Shorunmu, is somewhat peculiar, as the former Nigerian goalkeeper showed a clear lack of desire to be in camp for the matches against Guinea Bissau. "We do not want to go into any details because we have the utmost respect for all our ex-internationals, including Mr.

Shorunmu. It was only when we got the clear signal that he was unwilling to come, and the Head Coach was in a quandary, that he (Coach Peseiro) requested for the services of Olatunji Baruwa, who he had seen at work during the U20 AFCON in Egypt, to help do the work of training the goalkeepers." Despite the NFF's explanation, PFAN's Deputy Secretary, Edema Fuludu, told The Guardian, yesterday, that the association would take necessary steps to unravel the circumstances that led to the 'duo's sack.' "Shorunmu is a card-carrying member of PFAN and it is important we find out what really happened." We are not saying that the Super Eagles is the birth right of any ex-player, but a situation where coaches are being sacked without any genuine reason has to stop.

THE football world was left in mourning last week following the death of former Super Falcons' Head Coach, Ismaila Mabo. Mabo passed away on March 17th, 2023, leaving a rich legacy in Nigerian football.

However, amidst the sadness and grief, a touching tribute has been paid to Mabo by the President of world football-governing body, FIFA, Mr. Gianni Infantino.

Playvolume00:00/00:00Vict or Osimhen is the best striker in the worldTruvidfullScreen

In a letter of condolence that he signed and addressed to the President of NFF, Alhaji Ibrahim Musa Gusau on 20th March 2023, Infantino expressed, on behalf of the international football community, FIFA's deepest sympathy to the NFF, family, friends and loved ones on the passing of the titan.

The statement read in part: "I would like to express my sincerest and heartfelt condolences on the passing of the former women's national team coach, Mabo Ismaila. Words seem inadequate to express the sadness we feel for this loss.

"Former international player with regular appearances in the senior national team, he notably defended the colours of Mighty Jets FC in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Why I invited inactive Ndidi, Aribo, others camp - Peseiro

PESEIRO released 23-man list which includes some players who have not been in action for their respective clubs in their recent games.

Responding to questions after their first training session in Abuja on Monday night, Peseiro said those invited are the best legs for Nigeria adding that he invited players that he believed can deliver the results

FIFA President eulogises late Mabo



Mabo

"As a coach, Mabo Ismaila led the senior women's national team, the Super Falcons, to the quarter-finals of the FIFA Women's World Cup in 1999, to two Olympic Football Tournaments in 2000 and 2004, as well as to the 1998- and 2000-women's Africa Cup of Nations titles.

"Considered as one of the best coaches of his generation, inspiration to younger generations of coaches, having contributed to the growth of women's football in the country and around the world, his legacy and achievements, and in particular his personality, his loyalty and his human qualities will not be forgotten and he will be truly missed."

The FIFA President further stated that Mabo's contribution to the development of women's football in Nigeria and beyond could not be overemphasized, as he inspired younger generations of coaches with his dedication, passion, and commitment to the sport.

He concluded by expressing FIFA's support to the Nigerian football family during this difficult time and urged them to find solace in the fact that Mabo's legacy and impact on the sport will continue to live on.

Mabo's death has been a huge loss to Nigerian football, and the tributes pouring in from all around the world is a testament to the impact he had on the sport.

he wanted. "For me, I prefer to choose the best players. Though, they may not have more playing time but for me, the best player is the best player. He told BSN Sports at the Moshood Abiola Stadium Abuja.

"If they are not given chance to play in their clubs, it's my obligation and responsibility to

call them because I believe in them. If I believe in you to deliver for me, there is no problem if I invite such player. If they are injured it's different.

He added, "I have contact with them and their coaches and I ask their coaches if they're fit and they said, yes. If their coach said they are fit and didn't tell me that their performance have declined but they decided to choose other players over them. There's nothing wrong inviting such players.

Joe Aribo, Wilfred Ndidi,

Falcons to play New Zealand, Haiti

THE nine-time African champions are keen to make an impression at the Mundial later in the year

Nigeria's Super Falcons have lined up two friendly matches against Haiti and New Zealand in April ahead of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, which is scheduled to take place in Australia and New Zealand.

The friendlies will be played at the Mardan Sports Complex, Antalya, Turkey, where the team will be based during the preparation phase.

The Super Falcons will first face World Cup debutants Haiti on April 7 before taking on co-hosts New Zealand four days later on April 11. These

friendlies will be an opportunity for the team to test their strategies and tactics ahead of the prestigious tournament.

Randy Waldrum's side, which is made up of a blend of experienced and young players, will be looking to build on their recent victory over Costa Rica, which ended a seven-game winless streak.

The Super Falcons are one of the most successful teams in women's football on the African continent and will be hoping to make a strong showing at the World Cup.

The nine-time Africa Cup of Nations winners have been placed in Group A at the FIFA Women World Cup where they

will face tough opponents Australia and Canada, as well as the Republic of Ireland.

The Super Falcons have a

proud record in the Women's World Cup, having reached the quarterfinals in 1999, and made it past the group stage at the last edition.

What's next for Kamaru Usman after Leon

UFC 286 provided combat sports fans with a great night of fights this past weekend (Sat., March 18, 2023) inside The O2 in London, England. While there were several fighters celebrating their victories, there were just as many left feeling the post-fight blues.

Among them was Rafael Fiziev, who was busted open by Justin Gaethje during their

epic three-round war that saw "Ataman" come up short on the judges' scorecards (recap here). And the allegedly "greased" Casey O'Neill, who suffered the first loss of her mixed martial arts (MMA) career at the hands of Jennifer Maia.

But, which fighter is suffering from the worst post-fight hangover, now a few days removed from the show?

Coming into his trilogy fight against current Welterweight champion, Leon Edwards, Usman was high on confidence despite getting knocked out in their rematch seven months ago (see it again here). And he had every right to feel that way. After all, "The Nigerian Nightmare" did have a dominant win over "Rocky" in the first meeting, and he was — for all intents and purposes — up on the scorecards going into the final round of their second fight.

Still, all that was in the past and Usman was looking forward to a future as UFC champion once again. Unfortunately it was not to be,



Usman

because once the scorecards were tallied, Edwards went home with a majority decision, going up 2-1 in their great rivalry.

The contest was close, to be fair, and Edwards didn't dominate the fight. While "Rocky" had enough moments to win the judges over, there were several in the MMA community who felt "The Nigerian Nightmare" had done enough to get the belt back. But, the only opinions that matter were the those of the three judges sitting cageside.

"A special thank you to my management, family, friends,

and fans. I appreciate each and everyone of you. Wasn't my night but as always we go back to work. Congratulations Leon Edwards, great work," Usman said in a post-fight tweet.

As I mentioned earlier, the fight could have gone the other way and there probably wouldn't have been much uproar — except from the English fans — so Usman can hold his head up high. Despite the two straight defeats, Usman, 35, does not appear to be washed and/or on a decline after suffering the devastating knockout loss back in 2022.





Quest



writer

FRAGMENT

"The perennial insecurity in many African countries remains a source of concern to election managers. Recently, heads of Electoral Commissions from nine countries in West and Central Africa, including Nigeria, met in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (7-9 December 2022), to discuss the impact of insecurity on elections and measures to mitigate the risk to election personnel, stakeholders, materials and processes."

Prof. Mahmood Yakubu

PROF. MAHMOOD YAKUBU

Preparations, priorities for electoral integrity and inclusion

Continued from last week

Inter-agency Collaboration and Support

What other agencies do in support of the Commission is very important to the quality of elections. In its work, the Commission depends a lot on especially the judiciary, security agencies and media organisations. Inter-agency collaboration and support are therefore key in the conduct of the 2023 general election. To this end, INEC has established a long-standing collaboration with key agencies. We interfaced with different levels of the judiciary in the run up to the 2019 general election, and that engagement was very fruitful. For the last three electoral cycles, the Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) has been in existence and has supported the Commission. A lot of progress has been made in recent times through ICCES, especially regarding the production of a common code of conduct for security officials during elections, establishment of common situation rooms, expanding the Committee to include other agencies, the most recent being the involvement of agencies working on financial crimes. In addition, the Commission holds regular interactions with political parties, civil society organisations, the media, security agencies and development partners. Such engagements, collaborations and partnerships are critical to the success of the general election.

The most recent inter-agency stakeholder initiative of the Commission relates to the problem of vote selling and vote buying at polling units on election day. The Commission, in conjunction with security agencies, anti-corruption agencies, media regulatory agencies, political parties and the civil society organisations launched this major initiative in December 2022. The aim is to ensure a more robust monitoring and reporting of the illegal business of vote buying and to strengthen control and enforcement.

Electoral Operations, Procurement and Logistics

This is proceeding satisfactorily. On 4th January 2023, we received the final batch of the BVAS to be used for the election. That puts us on course to perform functional and integrity tests on every BVAS



to be deployed for the election, which has been concluded in many States nationwide. In addition, we plan to conduct a series of mock trials of the BVAS with actual voters in real-time in parts of the country to further ascertain their functioning in actual election situations. Other sensitive materials, such as the ballots and result forms, are being printed. The Commission is progressively taking delivery of them and deploying them to locations across the country.

Logistics has often been a major Achilles heel of elections in Nigeria. We are determined to solve the challenge. We have established a Logistics Management System, which uses an Android application and web dashboard to track election materials from procurement through storage to delivery. For the first time, we have a comprehensive Election Logistics Framework (ELF) to guide logistics for the general elections from planning, through deployment to retrieval. This is the first deployment of an end-to-end logistics framework for elections.

On election day transportation, the Commission recently signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the umbrella bodies of road transport and marine unions. We are presently working with the unions to deal with all the noticed bottlenecks to ensure a more efficient and timely delivery of materials to Polling Units.

The Commission is happy with the extent of preparations for the 2023 general election. This is borne out by the timelines in our election timetable of which 11 of 14 activities have been accomplished. However, despite our extensive preparations, there are still some outstanding issues and challenges of concern, some of which are beyond the remit of the Commission, to which I will now turn.

Insecurity and its Impact on the Election

The perennial insecurity in many African countries remains a source of concern to election managers. Recently, heads of Electoral Commissions from nine countries in West and Central Africa, including Nigeria, met in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (7-9 December 2022), to discuss the impact of insecurity on elections and measures to mitigate the risk to election personnel, stakeholders, materials and processes.

For many years, Nigeria has been grappling with its own insecurity. In the North-East, the long-standing Boko Haram insurgency has continued, albeit with attacks now more intermittent than regular. In the North-West and the North-Central, banditry, terrorism and the herder-farmer conflicts remain major challenges. In the South-South, the threat of renewed insurgency by groups demanding more share of petroleum revenue to the Niger Delta continues to simmer. In the

South-West, although an earlier surge by a group demanding independence for the region has considerably dissipated, recent violent attacks on places of worship, rise in the activities of violent cults and kidnapping groups, as well as a history of violence involving groups seeking to control markets and motor parks remain strong. In the South-East, the lingering agitation for separatism championed by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) pose a major security threat. Not only have violent attacks by a number of armed groups increased, the long-standing weekly lockdown of the five States in that geopolitical zone, continue to disrupt social and economic activities.

There is no doubt that violence and threat of violence are major challenges to credible election in 2023. Violence makes deployment for elections difficult, particularly where some of the attacks are targeted at the electoral process and participants. However, the Commission has been working with security agencies and other stakeholders to establish mechanisms to understand, track and mitigate security challenges. We are working collaboratively in the context of ICCES, and we also have the Election Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Tool (EVMAT), which is a research and diagnostic tool for predicting and mitigating election violence prior to elections. In addition, there is

the Election Risk Management Tool (ERM), which tracks and reports general risks to elections. In all, we feel assured by the actions we have taken and our collaboration with the security agencies. The 2023 general election will proceed as planned. There is no plan to postpone the election. A more pertinent issue for the Commission is the fate of displaced voters.

In 2015, an estimated 2 million voters were displaced by conflict in the North-East and North-Central part of the country. In response, the Commission worked with the National Assembly to amend the Electoral Act to support voting by Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). This entailed making additional provisions for enumeration of IDP voters and for voting in their camps. In response to the IDP problem, the Commission recently revised its Policy on IDP Voting, which it has been using since 2015, to cater for new realities of displaced populations. Unfortunately, in some States it is difficult to identify the IDPs because they are not in camps but rather settled among extended family members, relations and good Samaritans within safer communities where they are not registered voters. As a result, it is very difficult for the Commission to provide necessary electoral services to such IDPs. However, those in camps within Nigeria will be catered for in line with the Commission's policy.

Attacks on INEC facilities

Related to the problem of insecurity is the rising attacks on INEC facilities, materials and staff. In four years (2019-2022), the Commission experienced fifty attacks on its facilities, mostly in the form of arson and vandalism. In these attacks, buildings, election materials and vehicles were destroyed. Sometimes, these attacks have even targeted staff. For instance, during the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR), some staff of the Commission in Imo State were attacked, resulting in injuries and death.

However, the 2022 attacks constitute the deepest concerns for the Commission. This is so not only because they are increasingly happening closer to the general election, but also because some of them seem to be coordinated.

To be continued