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Events that shaped the year 2023

As 2023 comes to an end and 2024 taking shape already, it is noted that some of the stranger-than-fiction events that shaped the year will not fade away with it. Some will be etched in our memories forever. As a custom in Nigeria, general election years are always filled with doomsday predictions and expectations. "This is the year that will make or break Nigeria" is an expression I got used to since the 2003 elections. FRANCISCA ADIDI AND FWENJI GOAR WRITES.

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Tinubu



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Certificate racketeering in Nigeria

THE Nigerian news space was recently awash with the story of a Nigerian Daily reporter who bagged a Cotonou Degree in six weeks and his subsequent participation in the National Youth Service Corps, (NYSC), programme in Nigeria with the said degree.

AS expected, the incident has been trailed by reactions from various quarters as to the gravity and the dimension that certificate racketeering has taken in Nigeria over the years.

IT is common knowledge that the issue of certificate racketeering is one that is not only happening or prevalent in Nigeria or other developing countries, so there's no denying the fact that such atrocities exist. They have been there over the years and without doubt, a large number of Nigerians are in possession of such degrees.

REPORTS reveal that students in connivance with officials of the Beninese University produce fake degrees for a fee. What is worrisome is that this is not the only institution that is guilty of this act as many universities and higher institutions within and outside the shores of Nigeria have at one point or the other been fingered in such atrocities.

THE Federal Government of Nigeria in a swift reaction, set up an 8-man inter-ministerial committee to probe degree certificate racketeering by both foreign and local private universities in Nigeria with a charge to carry out their assignment diligently and without fear. It is pertinent to note that there are speculations that the perpetrators also have collaborators within the educational system, hence the charge by the Minister for Education Prof Tahir Mamman, to among others, review existing policies and procedures related to accreditation and certification to identify weaknesses in the system that are contributory to the issue.

IN the same vein, the committee is expected to make appropriate recommendations for the review of any rules, procedures and processes to prevent re-occurrence and sanctions for identified erring officials and make other recommendations that will strengthen the system of recognitions, accreditations and quality assurance of degrees in Nigeria.

WHILE the outcome of the investigation into the certificate racketeering is being awaited, Nigerians from different strata of the society have expressed worry and concern over the matter. They advise that the federal government should halt the accreditation of more schools at the moment and evaluate the existing ones.

IT is worrisome to note that one very basic reason for Nigerians going outside the shores of the country to obtain certificates even in private universities within the country, is the constant incessant face-off between the federal government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU, which ends up prolonging an ordinarily four year programme to six or more years.

ANOTHER issue is that of lack of basic amenities and infrastructure in Nigerian universities in spite of the humongous amounts being spent by the federal government on such institutions.

WE call on the federal government through the Federal Ministry of Education and its regulatory bodies, the National University Commission, NUC, to enforce rigorous accreditation processes and impose strict penalties for defaulters to serve as a deterrent to others.

Nigeria has no reason to be poor

— Tinubu

President Bola Tinubu has said that Nigeria has no reason to be poor and identified divisiveness as one of the nation's significant challenges.

He made these remarks on Friday while meeting with governors elected on the platform of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) under the Progressive Governors Forum (PGF) at the State House in Abuja.

President Tinubu stressed the need for the governing party to work towards healing and unifying the country by fostering a collective national vision and directing energy and resources into nation-building.

He urged APC governors to implement policies prioritising all Nigerians and always consider the national interest above political affiliations.

According to Tinubu, development policies would only have full relevance in people's lives when there is inclusivity, ownership, and sustainability.

He expressed confidence in the abundance of human, natural, and material resources in Nigeria, asserting that the financial system of the country would be re-engineered for inclusivity, effectiveness, and efficiency.

"We have no reason to be poor. Looking back on where we are coming from, where we have been, why we are facing infrastructural



Tinubu

decay, a lack of quality and comprehensive education, as well as a lack of health facilities. We are not a cursed country, but blessed," the President said in a statement by his spokesman, Ajuri Ngelale.

President Tinubu called on governors to devise a framework for the comprehensive and successful implementation of the school-feeding programme across all states, stressing the importance of involving opposition governors. He noted the programme's potential to encourage investments in agriculture, particularly in livestock farming and dairy.

Tinubu also discussed security

measures, considering the deployment of forest guards with better training and modern technological gadgets, securing the solid mineral and marine economic sectors with special police. He proposed the country's purchase and reservation of minerals, especially gold, to boost the foreign exchange reserve.

"We have a big marine economy, and I do not see why we should not have the marine police. We will have the same in solid minerals to keep the scavengers away. I am ready to invest in security. We will buy our own minerals and keep them in reserves, especially gold, which will be effective in our foreign exchange reserves," the president told the governors.

In response, Governor Hope Uzodinma of Imo State and Chairman of the Progressive Governors Forum thanked the President for involving governors in policy design and implementation, as well as for financial support to the states. Uzodinma pledged continued support from the governors as ambassadors for the President.

"We will continue to support you as your able ambassadors, willing ambassadors, and capable ambassadors," Governor Uzodinma said.

Judgments justify decision to end guber petitions court

LAWYERS and other Nigerians have hailed the Supreme Court judgments upturning the decision of the Appeal Court in governorship elections, saying the judgments justify the reason for ending election petitions at the apex court.

Human rights and constitutional lawyer, Chief Mike Ozekhome (SAN) said the judgment of the Supreme Court yesterday has justified why election cases should not stop at appeal court.

According to him, the law should be reviewed to ensure all cases go to the Supreme Court.

A human rights lawyer, Mr. Abdul Ganeey Imran, the Convener of Centre for Law & Civil Culture in his reaction said the judgment clearly demonstrates that the judicial arm of government still enjoys some level of independence.

Imran said various judgments

delivered by the apex court yesterday were nothing but a judicial stamping and recognition of the choices and wishes of the good people/electorates of those respective states.

He said, "The judgment of the Kano State governorship election in particular which affirmed the election of Governor Abba Yusuf is a further demonstration of the independence and impartiality of the judicial arm of government. This is because, majority of Nigerians are of the insinuation that the APC ruling party would influence the decision of the Supreme Court and ensure that the decision of the two lower courts, which nullified the election of the governor, would be affirmed.

"But the judgment clearly demonstrates that the judicial arm of government still enjoys some

level of independence."

Also, reacting, Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour wrote in his X handle:

"Today, the Supreme Court set a precedent: a governor or president can have multiple allegiances to states other than Nigeria and still be the chief security officer of Lagos or Nigeria.

"While I submit to this shocking decision of the Supreme Court, I worry for what this precedent holds for future generations being led by leaders with conflict of interest and loyalty.

"There is no Liberal Democracy that will accept to be led by an individual who has sworn an oath of allegiance to another country. Citizens should not have to contemplate the loyalty of their commander in chief or the chief security officer of their state. That said, as the court pleases."

Mutfwang dedicates victory to God amidst jubilation

By PETER TITLE

GOVERNOR Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang of Plateau State has dedicated his victory at the Supreme Court to God and the people of state, who stood by him and defended their mandate.

The supporters and associates of the governor who had thronged the premises of the Supreme Court, went into wild jubilation as soon as the verdict of the five-member panel was pronounced in favour of the People's Governor, Caleb Mutfwang.

In a statement issued by Gyang Bere, the Director of Press and Public Affairs (DOPPA), to the Governor, and made available to journalists on Friday after the judgment delivered at the Supreme Court in Abuja, Governor Mutfwang described the affirmation of his mandate as a divine act, and expressed his profound gratitude to God Almighty for sustaining him throughout the electoral process; from the polls to the tribunal, and to the apex court.

He hailed the landmark judgment as a triumph for democracy, noting that the highly respected Justices of the Supreme Court corrected the

erroneous impression created by the opposition in Plateau State, that the People's Democratic Party (PDP), lacked the structure to nominate and sponsor candidates for the 2023 General Elections.

The governor said, "I want to thank their Lordships who have today restored confidence in the judiciary. Their Lordships have demonstrated courage and they have raised the hope of the ordinary man in Nigeria that justice is still available in the nation.

"I want to thank Mr President for showing himself as a true democrat and not allowing the political space to become intoxicated. He has also shown that as a beneficiary of the people's votes, he would allow and support the judiciary to perform its role without undue interference.

"I want to thank the people of Plateau State who have stood by me. I want to thank Nigerians who have stood by us and I want to thank the international community that has also insisted that the votes of the people must count in Nigerian democracy," he said.


He added, "This judgment is historic and highly significant in the political journey of Plateau State. It

is the rebirth of a new Plateau where God has demonstrated his sovereignty as the owner and giver of power."


According to him, "This will motivate me to do more for my people. I wish to strongly reaffirm my commitment to continually provide purposeful leadership. We shall not rest on our oars until Plateau State becomes peaceful, united and prosperous."

Governor Mutfwang said he would always be grateful to the people of Plateau State for believing in him and entrusting him with their sacred mandate to lead them at this critical time in the history of the state. He called on all citizens, irrespective of political inclination, to join him in the quest of building a peaceful, united and prosperous Plateau.

Commenting on the Appeal Court judgments that nullified the election of National and State Assembly members elected under the Platform of the PDP on issues that were thrown out by the Supreme Court, Governor Mutfwang said, "We have just crossed the bridge and when we settle down to savor this victory, we will know what to do," he stated.



With
**Katdapba
Y. Gobum
On Sunday**



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You may want to ask: In the horde of the army of the operators, how can the government and its agents go through and get the genuine ones and the bad eggs? While we know that they have officials in charge of their association, we are not sure if anyone can say with certainty if they are all registered with the appropriate agency of government.

Before okada riders become law to themselves

IN Plateau State, it was the government of former Governor Jonah David Jang that set in motion the law that restricted the operations of Okada Riders, but however introduced tricycle as a means of transportation in the state to cushion the effects of taking them off the streets.

Several reasons must have accounted for the ban on May 4, 2012. But the announcement by then Commissioner for Information, Abraham Yiljap had a lure of controversy; as the state Police Command through its Public Relations Officer, ASP Samuel Dabai had denied knowledge of the directives issued by the government for the enforcement order.

Dabai had said in an interview with Reporters when they sought to know how the police would go about enforcing the ban order, 'we (police) are not aware of the directive by the State Government to enforce the ban on Okada in Jos and Bukuru metropolis. We only heard it just like any other person heard it.'

'As I am talking to you now, there has not been any official directive from the government to the Police Command to enforce the ban on motorcycles in the metropolis'.

As at then, and even as things now stand, the ban became necessary due largely to the growing spate of insecurity in some parts of the state; it has become imperative to reintroduce the ban once again, if the operators are to be stopped from becoming a law to themselves.

While it is a veritable means of transportation in most parts of Nigeria, it is a source of livelihood of youth persons in our state, as it is elsewhere in Nigeria. It has employed hundreds of thousands of youth, since it has become hard for government to give jobs to graduates of different institutions.

Rather than choosing to stay idle and to depend on stipends that may not always flow in from relations and or by engaging themselves in menial jobs, many would rather own or ride for another person a motorcycle for livelihood.

Diligent ones among the riders have become wealthy; however, those who decided not to be serious often rue the pains of their unfaithfulness in handling finances that accrue from

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For most part of the Governor Simon Bako Lalong administration, they operated as if they own the state. Some of them became law to themselves, as they worked against the state and its common good. Most of their activities did not have boundaries, as they increased in number and volatility with the law enforcement agencies, which they have always regarded as enemies brought by government to stop them from plying their trade in the state. But above all, amongst them, the genuine ones who were out for genuine business went about doing what was right. The bad eggs buoyed by other elements in the communities have infiltrated their ranks; apart from being engaged in crime have given the security agencies cause for concern.

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daily transactions over time.

Many of them would have changed their livelihood, sadly however, they chose to squander their chances in many ways. Some of them made the right choices and are, today, celebrating those choices and smiling to the banks.

For those of them who chose not to be good ambassadors, are, in most respects the ones who are a bad example in the business. They open their flanks to the different operations of criminal elements in their midst. Because they aligned themselves with different criminal elements in the community, they perpetrate all manners of crimes, thus making many residents to believe that they should no longer be trusted any more.

For most part of the Governor Simon Bako Lalong administration, they operated as if they own the state. Some of them became law to themselves, as they worked against the state and its common good. Most of their activities did not have boundaries, as they increased in number and volatility with the law enforcement agencies, which they have always regarded as enemies brought by government to stop them from plying their trade in the state.

But above all, amongst them, the genuine ones who were out for genuine business went about doing what was right. The bad eggs buoyed by other elements in the communities have infiltrated their ranks; apart from being engaged in crime have given the security agencies cause for concern.

To the extent that the increase in crime rates in the metropolis has taken a new high dimension in our communities, should give us cause to be worried. Perhaps more galling to sane people in our society is the manner some of the crimes are committed and left to end without it being resolved in the manner that should give hope to the society.

For years despite the ban, Okada Riders took advantage of the lull in managing the situation to the benefit the state's economy and its people. So long as they have not been managed well; just as we left the Keke operators to be the masters of the state's transport system; they

keep taking the laws into their hands.

Riders from the neighboring states took advantage of the lack of commitment in the business to move in with reckless abandon; thus creating unmanageable situations in the metropolis as well as taking the vulnerable angles the state is exposed to perpetrate unimaginable 'troubles'. From the onset, the state's errors in judgment were left unknowingly to haunt it: The state underestimated the dangers in allowing all comers to participate in the business without delineating areas of operations for one and all.

As such, many have come to understand that at the core of the operations of some of them are some of the 'virulent strains' that may not be obtainable elsewhere; yet some of them are not happy when government and security rise in concert to stop some of their unholy practices.

We have noted above that the nature of the business can be lucrative only if they go about it legitimately. The horde of the army of most times unruly owners are found in all the local government areas; as such, it will take all manners of persuasion and legal means to enforce a new dimension of the ban that has already been announced by the government of Barr Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang.

While its operators in the state await the new template of how they can operate in the metropolis and or a more holistic ban that may come into play, it is important to state that time has come to take proactive measures that will heal our streets of the madness that has continued to be visited on us through their activities. The new mechanism should be one that can deal with the monster to enable all breathe properly.

You may want to ask: In the horde of the army of the operators, how can the government and its agents go through and get the genuine ones and the bad eggs? While we know that they have officials in charge of their association, we are not sure if anyone can say with certainty if they are all registered with the appropriate agency of government.

On a daily basis, the operators engage Road Safety officials, Vehicle Inspection Officers and even Police

officers in reconciliation, just so to know if their papers are genuine, registered or have been renewed over the years. Some of them do not, and may not in the nearest future visit the Plateau State Internal Revenue Service to update their records.

Some of them prefer to deal with these officials unofficially rather than

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Many people have been affected through their activities, just as communities have been labeled for the wrong reason, so long as we have not been able to get these things sorted out; it is possible to continue to relieve in these experiences thinking nothing is wrong with our choices.

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get their papers renewed every year at the Plateau State Internal Revenue Service. The practice has got to come to an end, even as the services should find a way to redeem their images and punish any official found engaging in official corruption.

Over the years, the state government has lost revenue through their activities. If they must operate at all, and come under strict supervision, nothing stops them from registering and getting genuine papers. Some of them do not know that for government to transform and develop the state, it needs to internally generate revenues from such sources that will be used to change the face of our communities with infrastructure.

Lately, it has become apparent for the state government to think twice about their operations in the Jos-

Bukuru Metropolis. The gruesome murder of one Fwinbe Thomas Gofwan on September 25, 2023 on Domkat Bali road by a band of murderous Okada riders has set in motion more reasons why their activities must be stream-lined to save lives and properties in the city.

It is not on account of this act that Plateau has come to know of their questionable proclivity and operations over the years. We know for a fact that the questionable characters in their ranks have made matters worse for their operations in the state.

Many questionable activities have put question marks on those that we come across every day. I guess it is the same way that government agents regard them; and for this reason, it is of the opinion that their activities must be streamlined for the good of all.

Okada Riders are not angels; they have their flaws, and often they are deployed wrongly. They are our children, brothers and uncles, but have we stopped to ask ourselves why they are continuously been accused of engaging in crimes?

If they are close to us and we share certain affinities, is it not possible to check their excesses? I believe we can and should, if the sanitation can start from our homes, we can be sure that the war against those excesses can be won.

Many people have been affected through their activities, just as communities have been labeled for the wrong reason, so long as we have not been able to get these things sorted out; it is possible to continue to relieve in these experiences thinking nothing is wrong with our choices.

The unruly behaviour of some of the riders is a sad commentary on the business. Some motorists, but mostly those in the mould of our discussion are generally intemperate. This explains why they gather in solidarity should any of their members is hit or involved in some altercations with security, motorist or passenger.

Such has been on for a long period of time. If the above scenario has been experienced repeatedly for a time, such that it has not been control, pray, say what it would be like if they went out of their way to vent 'their anger' on something. This is not to justify any development in that mold.

What can be done by the authorities and even the riders to stem the tide? They need some education and defining their operational territory that is if government does not place a total ban on their activities.

We have said that taking them off the streets can be painful to motorists and their families. It is a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea. While they are a necessary evil, there are ways that government can handle the situation without resorting to inflicting pains on the riders and patrons.

It is about time we save ourselves from what they have become. Allowing them from further becoming law to themselves will continue to give us more areas of concern. Those who may have paid the supreme price through their activities can rest in peace if further injuries or even deaths are stopped.



Nigerians flying the flag high

IT can't be disputed that Nigerians are some of the most intelligent people on earth. Academically and otherwise, our citizens are flying the flag high. That is why its name has been written in gold or on the sands of time depending on whether it's for good or bad.

One of our talents is making way where there is no way. The story is told of a Nigerian who was denied an American visa several times. But somehow manages to find his way to America by crook. At the end of his visits, it was said he would present himself at the embassy where he would be deported back.

After doing this repeatedly, it was reported that America decided to employ him to help in the fight against illegal migrants. The crook accepted it after they fulfilled the conditions he gave them. This included allowing his parents, siblings to relocate to America. These people know the value of paying for valuable service.

For some reasons, Nigerians perform exceptionally, academically in developed climes than anywhere in the world. Have you heard of the Imafidons in London? It's a family based in London who is acclaimed to be the smartest. It is made up of 7 people. The father is a renowned professor and each of his offspring is making waves in academia. The first is a girl- Anne Marie who speaks 6 languages. She graduated from high school at the age of 10. At age 13, she was granted a British scholarship to study Mathematics in John Hopkins University, Baltimore. At 17, she obtained her Masters Degree from Oxford University. She was named a serial world record breaker in 2011 in the September edition of Higher Education Digest.

One of the Imafidon's daughter-Christina, was the youngest student in history to attend a British university - The United Kingdom University, now working as an intern with the Citigroup Corporation.

Samantha Imafidon also has an interesting track record. She had passed 2 high level Mathematics and statistics examinations at age 6. She became the youngest girl in the UK to attend secondary school. She was the one who tutored her younger twin siblings to pass their Maths secondary school test when they were also six.

The Imafidon twins- Peter and Paula, nicknamed wonder twins are Great Britain's highest

achievers. At 9 years, they made history to attend high school. They were the youngest to ever pass the University of Cambridge Mathematics examination after participating in the Excellence in Education Programme. They set world records when they passed the A/AS-level Maths papers.

You could say that this family is legendary. Our problem is that we don't celebrate Nigerians or Nigeria. We see nothing good in what is ours.

Others are spread all over the world, excelling in all matters. Is it music, academics, they have got it.

In some cases, greed, poverty and or blatant wickedness is the reason that Nigerians use something good for bad. A car dealer in Jos had a memorable day some time ago. Three men in an expensive car came to his stand to purchase a car. Considering the type of car they drove in and the fact that Oga was sitting in the car demolishing suya, the other two men were allowed to have a feel of the car.

Just at the point that the car dealer was walking towards Oga to complain to him that his boys were taking too long, Oga started doing some weird things. First, he took the paper that his suya was wrapped in, and began to eat it. At that point, people gathered around the car. Oga then started jumping around and tearing anything in sight. In the process, his cap fell off. Oga's hair solved the puzzle. His hair was thick brown as a result of lack of washing.

Oga was an ignorant accomplice to a robbery. His part was to sit in the car and eat the mountain of suya before him. And he did it alright until the suya was finished. That was when he realised that he was caged and he wanted out.

The car dealers wanted to hold on to the certified mad man who must have been picked and enticed with suya to dress in babban riga complete with cap but the police told them that he has committed no offense. The guys that came with him disappeared with the new car. It was later discovered that even the car the mad man was left in at the car stand, was a stolen car.

Nigerians have committed cybercrimes that were thought to be impossible. They have succeeded in crimes where others couldn't. All these take intelligence. Our problem is channeling it the right way.

It is not easy to remain unemployed in the face of daunting challenges. It is not easy to burn the night candle and yet, someone with no qualification gets a job you are qualified for. The change begins with you, if Nigeria will be better.

NEWS

By PALANG KASMI

THE Coalition of Plateau State Indigenous Youths, Ethnic Nationalities have condemned the Christmas eve attacks and killings in Bokkos and Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State.

The youth groups have also said they have lost confidence in security agencies for not protecting lives despite early warning signs, and distress calls during the attacks.

Reading a communique that was jointly signed by Chairman of the coalition, Com. Paul J. Dekete, and Secretary, Duwam Bosco, to journalists in Jos, they expressed their grievances.

The communique was drafted after arising from its emergency meeting in Mangu LGA in respect of the recent killings and increase in the spate of insecurity in the state. After which the coalition came up with a 6-point resolution which includes : Disappointment at how security agencies responded to distress calls for help by the victims and statistics of the level of destruction meted to the people by the killers.

The communiqué read: "On security operatives: The coalition observed with deep concern the actions of military personnel on the Plateau, based on their actions and responses during distress situation. The youths have lost trust and confidence in the personnel especially personnel of Sector 5 in Bokkos LGA.

The sector commander Lt Col T.T Pave, was accused by eyewitness among the affected communities, of unprofessional attitude.

Eye witness from communities affected also accused men under Lt Col T.T Pave' command of arresting and killing locals as seen in the case of late Mr. Samuel Longleng who was confronted and fired at will by men under his command at Garah - kawel, of Mushere district of Bokkos LGA among other cases.

They alleged that arrested Fulani were released within the shortest possible time." We are calling for his public probing and possible discipline to serve as deterrent and restore confidence in the military operation within the state. The attention of the coalition has been drawn to the harsh molestation of our people in Bokkos by personnel deployed for peace restoration in the area, after the massacre. Such personnel should be called to order".

"Destruction of farms and houses of victims/displaced persons: The coalition also observed that there is deliberate attempt by the Fulani militias to prevent victims from returning to their ancestral land/homes by looting their properties and food items. The coalition is calling on the government to take necessary action aimed at stopping the looting of properties of victims/displaced persons. So far, statistics show that more than two hundred (200) locals were killed in Bokkos alone, with over three hundred injured (300), over one thousand two hundred and ninety houses burnt (1,290), eighty one cars (81) burnt, nineteen thousand nine hundred and ninety five (19,995) person displaced, now taking refuge at

We've lost confidence in security operatives

- Youth coalition



Egbetekun

the mini stadium in Bokkos, apart from those who had fled to relatives in other parts of the state and country.

"While displaced persons from various villages are taking refuge in Bokkos town, information at the coalition's disposal indicate that some armed Fulani are being hosted at Maling (Angwan Hausawa). We are calling on security agents to search and disarm them, to avoid future attacks and killing of innocent citizens".

"North Central Development Commission: In view of the wanton destruction of lives and properties in Plateau State and across the North Central region of the country, we are calling on the Federal Government under the leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to establish the commission to cater for the millions of people displaced and living as Internally Displaced Persons in their ancestral land, as done in the Northeast region of the country. This will fast track speedy development and restoration of normalcy".

"Role of security agencies in the State: We observed with dismay that despite the presence of different security apparatus, human life and property should have been protected, but we only witnessed massacre of innocent people, especially children, women and the aged. We had earlier assumed there was intelligence gathering and sharing among the agencies which ought to have been promptly used to avert the ongoing act of terrorism and banditry in the state. That informed the coalition to conclude that either there is no synergy among the various security outfits or, their efforts are being sabotaged by their subordinates.

"Community protection and defense: The coalition calls on all Plateau communities/nationalities to respectively develop self-defense mechanism in order to survive the ongoing hostility and genocidal mission declared by the bandits and

other terrorist elements ravaging the state. It has become imperative to device all protective means, either physical, spiritual or both in the defense of our heritage. It also calls for synergy in community border-patrol within the state between ethnic groups.

The coalition also resolved that any attack on either of the ethnic groups/nationalities in the state shall be responded appropriately irrespective of where it happens".

"Mandate to government: The coalition also observed the non-commitment to security issues by the various Local Government Chairmen in the state, hence it is calling on State Government to mandate all Local Government Councils to immediately constitute and fund local security outfits/vigilante groups as early warning and early response mechanism to curtail the spate of killings across the state, pending the requisite response from the federal security agents".

"The coalition also salutes the gallantry role of Col. U.S. Abdulsalam, Sector 4 Commander for the rapid response in averting the escalation of the invasion that hit part of Barkin Ladi LGA".

The Coalition unequivocally commends the efforts of Maj. Gen. A.E Abdulsallam, the GOC 3rd Division who doubles as the Commander of Operation Safe Haven-OPSH for his accessibility, prompt response and non-bias on early warnings given.

The coalition however used the forum to call on all Plateau residents not to relent in making available any early warning signal, for early response.

The group further advised all concerned natives and other residents to be on red-alert, come out in mass whenever there is a clarion call for the needful, otherwise to avoid extinction in the hands of terrorists.

POLITICS

Soro empowers leadership of PDP

By DUMAH RANDOMG

HONOURABLE Mansur Manu Soro, member representing Darazo/Ganjuwa Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, has empowered the leadership of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in his constituency with the sum of N32.9 million.

The lawmaker who stated this in a press statement made available to newsmen by his Media aide, Aleeyu Darazo, urged members of the party and other supporters to remain law abiding and supportive to the administration of Governor Bala Mohammed.

According to Mansur Manu Soro, the gesture was meant to show appreciation to the party officials and leaders in Darazo/Ganjuwa Federal Constituency for supporting him during the 2023 general elections.

While expressing delight over the party leadership's continued support and prayers for his success, the lawmaker pledged more democracy dividends in his constituency.

The press statement mentioned the beneficiaries to include local government and ward party executives, stakeholders and campaign team members in Darazo and Ganjuwa local government areas.

Others are leaders of the women and youths wings of



the PDP at all levels as well as campaign coordinators of Mansur Manu Soro (MMS) 2023 electioneering campaigns.

The statement stated that 23 coordinators got N300,000 each, totaling the sum of N6,900,000 while 23 women leaders also got N300,000 each amounting to the sum of N6,900,000. Other party officials smiled home with the sum of N19.1m.

The federal lawmaker vowed to ensure that he will make the PDP stronger until his constituency became the stronghold of the party in Bauchi State.

Our correspondent reports

that sometime in April 2023, the lawmaker also donated the sum of N7.5m to all PDP leadership and stakeholders in the Federal Constituency shortly after the announcement of the election results by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Supreme Court reserves judgment on Delta Governorship election

From JIDAUNA YANUNG, Abuja

THE Supreme Court has reserved its judgment on three appeals seeking judgment pataining Governor Sheriff Oborevwori of Delta State.

The appeals were brought before the court by candidates of the APC Governorship elections,

From TERESE TUHWA, Makurdi

THE governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the March 18th, 2023 governorship election and immediate past Speaker of the Benue State House of Assembly, Engr. Titus Uba has congratulated Governor Hyacinth Alia on his victory at the Supreme Court, Abuja.

The immediate past Speaker said, "As a law abiding citizen who believes in the unity and development of the state and nation, I have accepted the decision of the court in good faith".

The PDP governorship candidate said he has given utmost gratitude to God Almighty for having sustained him and his family in health and life to be able to offer himself for service during the 2023 election.

He maintained that it was his earnest desire to serve and make contributions to the growth of Benue State but it however, pleased God to give that opportunity to his brother, Governor Alia.

PDP guber candidate congratulates alia on s' court verdict

The immediate past Speaker noted that he believes in the strength of the democratic institutions and trusts that the best

to accord the governor all the support that he needs to enable him succeed. He appreciated the immediate past governor



interest of Benue State will continue to be upheld.

Engr. Uba who wished Governor Alia success as he steers the ship of the state, further enjoined the people

of the state, Chief Samuel Ortom for his mentorship and unquantifiable support over the years, culminating in his emergence as governorship candidate for the party in last year's

Supreme Court returns Dauda Lawal as Zamfara governor

THE Supreme Court, on Friday, upheld the election of Governor Dauda Lawal of Zamfara State.

The apex court vacated the November 16, 2023 judgement of the Abuja Division of the Court of Appeal, which declared the governorship election that held in the state on March 18, as inconclusive.

It held that Lawal, who was the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP), secured the majority of lawful votes and was rightly declared the winner of the gubernatorial contest by the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC).

In the lead judgement that was delivered by Justice Emmanuel Agim, the apex court, described the verdict of the appellate court as "perverse".

It restored the earlier decision of

the Zamfara State Governorship Election Petitions Tribunal, which affirmed Lawal's election victory. It will be recalled that INEC had declared that Governor Lawal of the PDP polled a total of 377,726 votes to defeat the immediate past governor of the state and current Minister of State for Defence, Bello Matawalle, who scored 311,976 votes.

The declaration by INEC was on September 18, 2023, affirmed by the tribunal which held that Matawalle, who was the candidate of the All Progressives Congress, (APC), failed to establish his allegation that some polling unit results were excluded by the electoral body.

The tribunal further held that Matawalle and his party failed to prove their claim that INEC did not comply with electoral rules while conducting the election, even as it awarded a cost of

N500,000 against the Appellants. However, the appellate court voided the judgement of the tribunal and declared the Zamfara state governorship election as inconclusive.

The appellate court nullified the return of Governor Dauda as the winner of the gubernatorial contest.

It ordered INEC to conduct a fresh election in three Local Government Areas, LGAs, of the state where election results were either not counted or unlawfully cancelled.

Specifically, while the appellate court ordered a fresh poll in the entire Maradun LGA of the state, it directed INEC to hold elections in some polling units in Birnin-Magaji and Bukyum LGAs.

The appellate court held that the tribunal wrongly evaluated the evidence that was presented before it by the parties.

It held that INEC acted wrongly when it relied on information it obtained from its IReV portal to collate the final result of the governorship election. According to the court, the IReV was only meant for the benefit of the public and not to serve as an election result collation platform. Besides, the appellate court stressed that going by the margin of lead principle, INEC, ought not have made a return in the election, considering the existence of over 98,904 votes in the three affected LGAs.

It held that the Appellant, Matawalle, successfully discharged the burden of proof that was placed on him by the law to warrant the invalidation of the declaration of Governor Lawal as

the bonafide winner of the gubernatorial election.

"The 1st Respondent was not duly elected by a majority of lawful votes. His return was not in compliance with provisions of the Electoral Act," the appellate

court held.

However, in its judgement on Friday, the Supreme Court vacated the Court of Appeal decision for being perverse and against the weight of evidence.

...Upholds Mutfwang, Nwifuru's elections as Plateau, Ebonyi governors

THE Supreme Court has set aside the judgment of the Court of Appeal sacking Governor Caleb Mutfwang of Plateau State.

The court, in a judgment on Friday, upheld the appeal filed by Mutfwang on the ground that it was meritorious.

In the lead judgment, Justice Emmanuel Agim, the court affirmed the judgment of the election tribunal which had dismissed the petition by the APC and its candidate, Chukwuma Emmanuel Odii.

Justice Abubakar described the election tribunal which had dismissed the petition by the APC and its candidate, Chukwuma Emmanuel Odii.

Justice Agim held that Mutfwang was qualified to contest the election because the primary election that produced him was well conducted by the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the PDP.

The court held that the tribunal lacked the jurisdiction to hear the petition that queried the nomination and sponsorship of Mutfwang and that the APC, not the PDP, had the right to challenge the way it got its candidate.

He held that there was no evidence that the PDP disobeyed an order issued by the Plateau State High Court ordering fresh elections for the constitution of the state executive committee of the party.

Similarly, the apex court on Friday upheld the election of Francis Nwifuru as the Governor of Ebonyi State.

The court, in a judgment on Friday, delivered the judgment, dismissing the appeal by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and its candidate, Chukwuma Emmanuel Odii.

Justice Abubakar described the appeal as lacking in merit.

The Court of Appeal in Lagos had earlier affirmed the election of Nwifuru as the duly elected Governor of Ebonyi State.

In a unanimous decision, the three-member panel led by Justice Jummai Sankey dismissed the appeal filed by Chukwuma Odii of the PDP.

The panel also resolved all five issues raised against the appellant and dismissed the nomination and sponsorship of appeal for lacking merit.

Justice Sankey held that the PDP and its candidates lacked the legal right to meddle in the internal affairs of the APC as it relates to the nomination of candidates.

The Ebonyi Governorship Election Petition Tribunal sitting in Abuja had also upheld the election of Nwifuru as governor. INEC had declared Nwifuru of

the APC as the winner of the 18 March governorship election in the state.

Nwifuru polled 199,131 votes to defeat his closest challenger, Ifeanyi Odii of the PDP, who garnered 80,191 votes.

Bernard Odoh, came third with 52,189 votes.

Odoh and his party, the All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA, challenged the declaration of Nwifuru as the elected governor of the state and asked the tribunal to nullify his election on the grounds of alleged certificate forgery and "ineligibility" to stand for the election.

The APGA candidate contended that Nwifuru, at the time of the election, was still a member of the PDP and therefore ineligible to be sponsored for the election by the APC.

Odoh further argued that Nwifuru was not qualified to stand for the election because he allegedly submitted a fake certificate to INEC.

He urged the tribunal to order for a second election between the other two candidates who scored the highest number of votes at the previous election and exclude the governor from taking part in it.



Lawal

SUNDAY POLITICS

Political events that shaped Nigeria in 2023

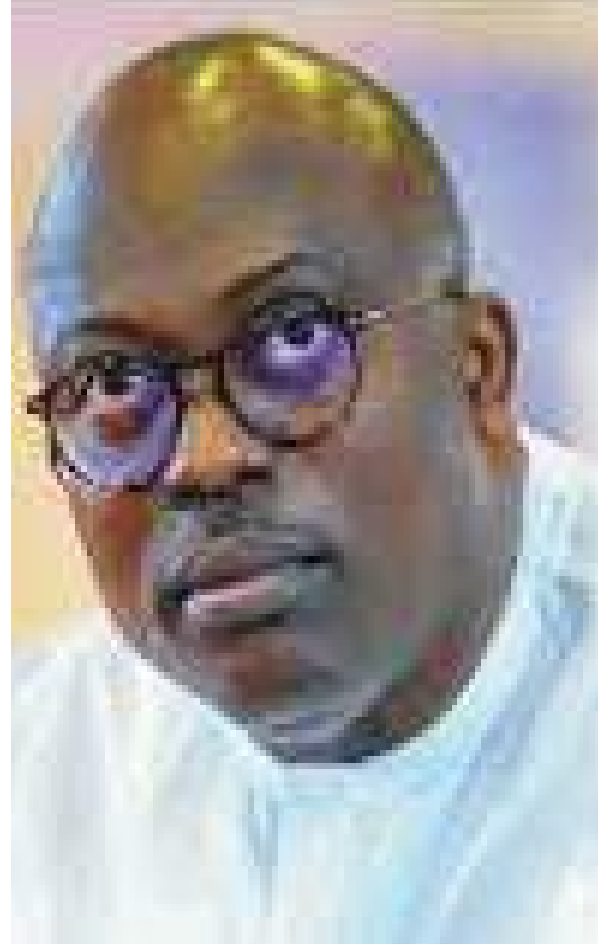
The year 2023 can be said to be one of the most popular years in the history of Nigeria for particular reasons ranging from it being an electioneering year and the year which the much talked about petroleum subsidy removal actually happened, amongst others. LUCY CHINDABA writes.



Tinubu



Wike



Fubara

THE year 2023 may have come and gone and we're now in 2024 but what we're going through at the moment are mostly consequences of some of the events that happened and shaped the year.

On the political scene particularly, the year 2023 was quite eventful as Nigerians went to the polls to elect their leaders which was held on February 25, 2023 and March 18, 2023 from the President, Senators, members of the House of Representatives, Governors and members of the State Houses of Assemblies across the country.

The first is the presidential election which was held February 25, 2023 in which Peter Obi of Labour Party (LP), Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Senator Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the All Progressive Congress (APC), were the top contenders in an election that had over thirty presidential candidates.

One notable event in the year is Peter Obi's entrance into the political scene with the so many intrigues of moving from one popular political party, the PDP, to a not so popular one, Labour Party and making it rise to the third most populous party in such a short space of time was really surprising to the extent that it was being popularly referred to as the Obidient Movement or the Obi phenomenon in some quarters.

At the end of the exercise, the election umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) declared Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu the winner having secured a total of 8,794,726 votes closely followed by PDP's Atiku Abubakar who polled 6,984,520 votes and Labour Party's Peter Obi who got 6,101,533 votes.

As is common with elections in Nigeria and else where Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi were not satisfied with the said results and

immediately headed to court to seek justice. However right from the presidential election tribunal through to the court of appeal and eventually to the supreme court the judgements were all in the same vein as their applications were thrown out as they were lacking in merit and affirm President Tinubu as the duly elected president.

Then came May 29, 2023 the day for the swearing in of the elected president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the President in his inaugural speech, made the much awaited declaration that the era of fuel subsidy was over. This declaration is one that has over the years been mulled over and which virtually all the presidential candidates had in their electioneering campaigns expressed the desire to do away with it. Reports indicate that though this was not part of the president's speech initially Nigerians were however thrown into a celebratory mood as they felt it was to signal an end to the sufferings of Nigerians which they hitherto thought it was the cause of their hardship. Months down the line however the reality is that this was just the beginning of more difficulty for Nigerians as prices of good and services have skyrocketed out of the reach of the common man.

Another declaration that closely followed the President's declaration of the removal of fuel subsidy is the flotation of the Naira in which the immediate consequence was a hike in the price of petroleum which has had a ripple effect on the life and livelihood of Nigerians affecting prices of food and other household goods due to the hike in transport fares of more than 200 to 300 percent in some cases.

In trying to cushion the effect the said declaration was having on the citizenry, the government of President Tinubu came up with the

students loan scheme and the Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme to help cushion the effect of the policies.

The National Assembly, the Senate and House of Representatives, were shortly going to be inaugurated and another round of politicking soon took center stage and reports have it the battle was so fierce that most of the contenders resorted to the use of money particularly Dollars to entice their members.

Discussing the 2023 political activities cannot be complete without the mention of the feud between the Rivers State Governor Similaye Fubara and his predecessor who is the current Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The incident which was characterized by moves to impeach Governor Fubara, the decamping of 27 members of the Rivers State House of Assembly from the PDP to the APC, the burning of part of the Assembly complex and its subsequent demolition of the entire complex causing the people of Rivers State billions of Naira.

One commendable action of the present administration is President Tinubu's ability to wade into crisis ridden states to broker peace which has had some successes so far in Edo and Ondo and so it was not surprising that President Tinubu again waded into the feud between the two gladiators in the Rivers State crisis. After a meeting with the various stakeholders from Rivers State from both sides of the divide and in an attempt to bring an end to the war, an eight-point agreement was arrived at although that too generated a lot of reactions with many of the opinion that the agreement was made to favour the FCT Minister.

So far, as part of the conditions for ending the political feuds, court cases were supposed to be withdrawn, the impeachment notice on Governor Fubara is to be withdrawn, among others and it's a known fact that these

have already been adhered to, but does that signal the end of the Rivers State crisis? Only time will tell.

Also, in the same year there were some intrigues in Ondo where the governor Akereolu who has been battling some health issues and had gone for medical attention abroad and was to go for another but refused to hand over power to his deputy Ayedatiwa as acting governor. In line with that some power tussle ensued and the state house of assembly even went ahead to institute an impeachment proceeding on the deputy governor, who then took the matter to court and the court ruled against his impeachment.

With the intervention of President Tinubu however, the deputy governor survived the said impeachment as it was withdrawn and the governor was prevailed upon to handover power to his deputy and went on the medical trip.

Unfortunately, the Ondo State Governor His Excellency Rotimi Akereolu did not survive the long battle against prostate cancer and passed on on December 27, 2023 in Germany. The former speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Ghali Umar Na'abba, was said to have also passed on the same day.

Shortly before the end of the said year, on December 30, 2023, the National Assembly passed the 2024 Appropriation Budget of 28.77 trillion naira (\$34billion) the first for the current administration in which an additional funding increase was sought from the original 27.5 trillion naira budget. President Tinubu had on November 29, 2023 presented the 2024 budget titled Budget of renewed hope to the NASS and they had worked round the clock to ensure its passage before the calendar year comes to an end.

Here on the Plateau, the governorship and state house of assembly election sprang a lot of surprises as the ruling APC lost to PDP

with Caleb Mannaseh Mutfwang emerging governor after his declaration by INEC. Also, most of the seats were won by the PDP who formed the majority in the House and a speaker was soon elected. However due to some political intrigues and court cases from the election tribunal, to the appeal court, towards the end of the year, a court ruling however sacked all the house members from the PDP extraction on the basis of the fact that the opposition PDP had no structure were sacked and the court ordered INEC to issue certificate of return to those who contented under the APC.

An interesting scenario from the Plateau State House of Assembly is the emergence of the only candidate of the Young Peoples Party (YPP) Hon. Kudangbena Dewan as the Speaker of Plateau State 10th Assembly as result of the resignation of the former speaker Rt Hon. Moses Thomas Sule and his deputy a day before the outcome of his case in the appeal court.

However, it is sad to note that the State was again thrown into mourning with the dastardly and wicked killing of over 200 innocent citizens and properties worth millions of naira destroyed on Christmas eve by bandits and armed gunmen. President Tinubu has since responded and top security echelon have all visited the state at one point or the other and promised to bring an end to the recurring attacks and killings by the marauders.

It is therefore hoped that as we start another year, that governments at all levels will do all in its power to alleviate the sufferings of Nigerians with their purchasing power drastically reduced and living in constant fear due to the insecurity being experienced in the country at the moment particularly kidnapping which has become an industry in Nigeria.

SUNDAY POLITICS

An examination of political ego vs. public interest

Is Hon. Femi Gbajabamila justified in naming publicly funded projects after himself? An examination of political ego vs. public interest. writes AFOLABI ABIODUN.

IN the quest for a better Nigeria, the need for a robust system of accountability stands paramount. Public officers, whether appointed or elected, must understand their role as servants to the public, ensuring that the resources entrusted to them are used for the public good and not for personal enrichment. This understanding must be crystal clear among the populace: public officials are there to serve, not to be served. Yet, the remnants of a colonial mentality still hinder our progress in holding leaders accountable and demanding transparency in their stewardship.

This week's announcement by the Lagos State Governor of several commissioned projects in Surulere, including the Femi Gbajabamila Conference Centre at Lagos State University (LASU), the reconstructed Babs Animashaun Road and Census Bridge, the 80-bed Femi Gbajabamila General Hospital, and the Sam Shonibare Youth Development Centre, drew attention not for the projects themselves but for the audacity to name them after the supposed sponsor, Hon. Femi Gbajabamila. These projects, evidently constructed with public funds, raise critical

questions about allocation, appropriation, and the propriety of naming rights for public projects. This reflects a broader issue of accountability where leaders view their service as a privilege or favour, not as a duty to the public. It is imperative that the handling of constituency projects by senators and other members of parliament be thoroughly reviewed and seen as a public service rather than personal empowerment projects.

Hon. Femi Gbajabamila, known for his advocacy for due process and integrity, notably rejected a national honour because he felt that he had not achieved enough to merit such an award and was concerned over the integrity of the honours' list. His actions in naming public projects after himself seem incongruent with his stated values and advocacy for due process and integrity. This is reminiscent of the



Gbajabamila

criticisms he leveled at former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who in a few hours as a sitting president raised several billions from government contractors and state governors for his private library, employing quid pro quo tactics. Just as it was wrong then, it remains wrong now for any public servant to name projects built with public funds in their names.

This incident is emblematic of a larger culture of impunity where individuals commit acts of injustice without accountability. Public service is about stewardship of public resources and making decisions that benefit the public interest over personal gain. A functional public service system is characterized by transparency, accountability, and a commitment to the public good.

Looking at accountability in other countries, there are instances where public outcry and legal frameworks have led to significant consequences for corrupt officials. In some European nations, politicians found guilty of corruption or malfeasance have faced public shaming, legal repercussions, or even been physically thrown into dumpsters by protestors as a symbol of public disgust

to one of accountability is essential. Only then can the public truly trust that their leaders are serving their interests, leading to a more engaged, informed, and empowered populace. As Wole Soyinka stated, "The greatest threat to freedom is the absence of criticism." This quote underscores the importance of accountability through the act of criticism and questioning, which are vital for the health of any democratic society. Furthermore, Chinua Achebe's words resonate deeply here: "One of the truest tests of integrity is its blunt refusal to be compromised." This speaks to the heart of accountability, emphasizing the importance of maintaining integrity and refusing to be swayed or compromised.

In conclusion, the path to a better Nigeria lies in establishing a strong accountability framework, educating the public on their rights and responsibilities, and ensuring that leaders are held to the highest standards of integrity and public service.

It's about changing mindsets, strengthening institutions, and collectively striving for a nation where public resources are utilized for the common good, and where public service is carried out with the utmost responsibility, transparency, and dedication to the welfare of all citizens. This is not just a vision but a mandate for all Nigerians, as we work together to build a nation that truly reflects our collective aspirations and values.

“

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SUNDAY PEOPLE

GOVERNOR MUTFWANG AT SUPREME COURT ABUJA

The Executive Governor of Plateau State, Barr. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang was on Friday at the Supreme Court, Abuja and was confirmed the duly elected Governor of the State by Judges of the Supreme Court



Governor Mutfwang (left) with one of his Lawyers at the Supreme Court



Governor Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang (left) being congratulated by the PDP National Officer, Hon. Theophilus Dakas-Shan and Sen. Dr. Simon Mwakon



Plateau State Governor, Barr. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang (left) with the PDP National Officer, Hon. Theophilus Dakas-Shan during the Court session



Governor Mutfwang (left) with the State Chairman, PDP Hon. Chris Adukuchili Hassan



Cross section of Lawyers at the Supreme Court



Hon. Isaac Kwallu, Hon. Dr. Nicholas Kemi Nshe and others at hand congratulating the Governor, Barr. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang



Governor Mutfwang addressing newsmen after being declared duly elected Governor of Plateau State



Governor Mutfwang, Sen. Dr. Mwakon, Sen. AVM Bali in a group photograph with other well-wishers in Abuja

It is no longer news that the President, Asiwaju Ahmad Bola Tinubu on November, 29th presented and laid the 2024 budget before a joint session of the National Assembly. What is making waves however, is the mixed reactions it has been generating. What is a budget and why do we need a budget one may ask? For the purpose of hindsight, a budget is a law that outlines how public resources are allocated to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of the citizens. The budget, which is also referred to as the appropriation bill is introduced by the executive, presented to the legislature for consideration and approval before it is eventually signed and passed into law by the executive. According to Sections 80-84 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), both the executive and legislature have a role to play in the budget process. It is common knowledge that the country's economy is at its worst ever and for us to get back on track, the planning and implementation of the budget must be taken seriously. Tagged 'Budget of Renewed Hope', the 2024 budget has the total sum of N27.5 trillion with N9.92 trillion as recurrent expenditure while the capital expenditure consists of N8.7 trillion. Even though the President did promise that the budget will ensure micro-economic stability, poverty reduction and greater access to social security among others, many are of the view that these promises are far from being attainable, given the current economic situation in the country.

However, Mr. President has highlighted areas of priority to include security, local job creation, macro-economic stability, investment environment optimization, human capital development, poverty reduction and social security. Equally highlighted are plans for a comprehensive overhaul of the country's security architecture, which analysts say is long overdue. Many also agree that the need to strengthen our land enforcement capabilities that would ensure the protection of lives, property and investments across the country is what should be of utmost priority.

Interestingly, speaking on the issue of international partnerships and investments, analysts blame the government for failing on its part to provide an enabling environment for businesses to thrive. For one, it is believed that if Nigeria has to attract foreign investments, a lot still needs to be done. Recall that recently, it was all over the news that a multi-national company resident in Nigeria, known as Proctor and Gamble (P&G) has declared that it would no longer be able to continue production in the country, due to the frequent increase in dollar price.

The company has therefore, opted to stop production while focusing on importing the

finished products instead. This according to observers is a big setback for the Nigerian economy. Imagine the number of people that would now be thrown into the already saturated labour market. According to reports, about fifty thousand people are about to lose their jobs and means of livelihood.

The Senate President Dr. Godswill Akpabio and Chairman of the National Assembly in his welcome address during the budget presentation collaborated with President Tinubu that the National Assembly places a strong emphasis on national security,



NASS: As reactions trail 2024 budget presentation



Peoples Democratic party (PDP). It has described the N27.5 trillion 2024 budget proposed by President Tinubu as a huge disservice which if passed, will further plunge the nation into more economic depression and helplessness. According to its National Publicity Secretary Hon. Debo Ologunagba, the claim that the budget is a 'Budget of Renewed Hope' is unfounded. He described it as completely devoid of concrete mechanisms to revive the economy, create jobs, address the comatose manufacturing and productive sectors, human capital development deficiencies and depleting the expectancy of Nigerians.

Meanwhile, criticism is not just trailing the proposed budget itself, but the attitude displayed by our lawmakers at the event. Nigerians were taken aback as the lawmakers in what can be described as a comedy skit sang and chanted to the admiration of the president. As soon as the senate president gave room for the president to present his budget estimate, the joint session of members of the National Assembly erupted into the song "on your mandate we stand..." praising and applauding the president. This display of sycophancy many say, was unwarranted and unnecessary and was only aimed at impressing Tinubu who clearly understood what their intentions were. Some posited that the lawmakers may be indirectly making a mockery and jest of Nigerians by attempting to trivialize the serious business in front of them. Are the so called representatives of the people doing that to boost the president's ego for their personal interest?

recognizing it as a cornerstone for progress. He acknowledged the fact that the security challenges demands a united front, promising to work with the executive in order to address and overcome the challenges confronting the country.

On his part, Speaker of the House of Representatives Hon. Abbas Tajudeen believes that there is need to enact a Budget Act that will strengthen the budget process. Emphasising that the practice has been established in democracies across the world, he said supporting the programmes and policies of Government will not only alleviate poverty but will boost economic diversification as well as general social sector reform and development. Incidentally, one of those criticising the budget is the

You would recall that since the inauguration of the tenth national assembly, it has been in the center of one storm to another. First was the outrageous allocations budgeted for the renovation of their offices to the huge sum allocated for the purchase of luxury cars. The criticism generated can only be imagined, especially after a certain senator gave the excuse that the purchase of luxury cars for members became necessary due to the state of bad roads in the country.

SUNDAY MAGAZINE



Tinubu



Buhari



Emefiele

Events that shaped the year 2023

As 2023 comes to an end and 2024 is taking shape already, it is noted that some of the stranger-than-fiction events that shaped the year will not fade away with it. Some will be etched in our memories forever. As a custom in Nigeria, general election years are always filled with doomsday predictions and expectations. "This is the year that will make or break Nigeria" is an expression we got used to since the 2003 elections. FRANCISCA ADIDI AND FWENJI GOAR WRITE.

WE were constantly reminded of the political events of 1963, 1983 and 1993 and how 2023 might follow the trend, especially with the first civilian-administered general election of the Fourth Republic. A strong link was created between the constant number "3" and major political crises in Nigeria.

Or haven't we survived? I would say we have, but some would say we only muddled through. I still prefer "muddling through" to something worse. Some countries have gone to war, or experienced armed conflicts, or suffered military coups, after elections. This was not our story in 2023, despite how bitterly the elections were fought, won and lost. Even in the past, when people took to the streets, it was usually peaceful demonstrations and violent protests, but no armed struggle. I consider the 2023 General Election as one of the most eventful ever as well as one of my extraordinary memories of the year — plus four other noteworthy developments. Here we go.

One, naira recoloration. Basically, what the Buhari administration did was to withdraw the naira from circulation under the guise of "redesign" to fight corruption and prevent "vote buying" in the general election. Neither the old nor the new notes were available as Nigerians went through hell trying to carry out basic transactions. They had to resort to the good old 'trade by barter'.

Many died because they were unable to prepay medical bills for critical treatments and surgeries. Nigerians were using Naira to buy Naira. Roadside POS operators suddenly became gods. Some were arrested by security agencies. Many Nigerians used the opportunity to showcase their wickedness.

Nigerians went through real hell. People were spending days and nights at the banks. Some resorted to attacking banking staff because of a widespread belief that indeed, there was enough cash printed but it was being hoarded. The EFCC went through the regular drama of "arresting" bank executives for hoarding the new notes, but I am yet to hear of any trial or conviction. People were attacking ATMs, hoping to find some life-saving notes inside. The intervention of the Supreme Court to extend the life of the old notes brought some relief, but the CBN claimed to have destroyed the N1,000 notes. A challenged economy suffered memorable body blows. We survived all the same.

Secondly, the ascendancy of Bola Ahmed Tinubu to power. One of the most extraordinary events of 2023, or since the amalgamation of Nigerian protectorates in 1914, was the way and manner Tinubu became president of Nigeria. I claim to be a student of Nigeria's electoral history, especially presidential polls, but I have to accept that the Tinubu story was an outlier. Alhaji Shehu Shagari won the

1979 presidential election because he had the backing of the establishment and formed a strong alliance in two southern states. He won re-election in 1983 with the power of incumbency. Bashorun MKO Abiola won in 1993 with a solid national political network but the establishment kept him out.

In 1999, Obasanjo had the support of military heavyweights, the establishment and a solid national political network. He was re-elected in 2003 with the power of incumbency. Yar'Adua was installed by the establishment in 2007, while Dr Goodluck Jonathan was helped by the power of incumbency in 2011 which he used to garner nationwide support. Buhari came to power in 2015 in one of the most extraordinary elections, defeating an incumbent — a first in our history — by securing an all-important alliance with the south-west to breast the tape. He was re-elected in 2019 obviously by deploying the power of incumbency. The establishment and incumbency are always critical factors.

Enter Tinubu. The all-important incumbency was not in his corner. Regardless, he got his party's ticket. The naira policy was allegedly targeted at him. He made plenty gaffes and his rivals said he was not mentally and physically fit. He ran a Muslim-Muslim ticket in a deeply divided country. There were questions over his university degree. There

were concrete rumours that an opposition candidate was the choice of the establishment. He lost the majority of votes in Lagos, his home turf, and the south, his region, but coasted home by winning the majority of northern votes against a seasoned northern candidate. Tinubu's well-oiled political and institutional networks did the magic.

Three, who built Lagos? One unpalatable memory of the 2023 elections was the renewal of the age-old rivalry between Yorubas and Igbos in Lagos State. The fact that one of the presidential candidates, Peter Obi, was Igbo worsened the hostilities. There were reports of voter repression in favour of Tinubu. MC Oluomo, a staunch Tinubu supporter, was caught on video saying Igbos would not be allowed to vote in his polling unit. Obi enjoyed massive support from Igbos and an impressive number of non-Igbos while Tinubu did not have the full support of Yorubas and Christians. Obi did the unthinkable by defeating Tinubu in a state he was thought to be invincible. It was an earthquake.

Sadly, the bitter aftertaste of the politicking has refused to disperse, with both groups exchanging claims and counterclaims on who "built" or owned Lagos State. It is not a new debate — there are records of similar tensions during colonial era. Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, leader of Ohanaeze, the pan-Igbo interest

group, fuelled the fire by claiming Igbos developed Lagos swamps. For me, one of the most unfortunate and unforgettable memories of 2023 is the Yoruba-Igbo face-off. I suspect things would get worse in future elections. My consolation is that it seems to be purely political. Socio-economic relations appear stable. Meanwhile, the romantic connections are still thriving.

2023 has defined on the year which go on down in history as a very tough year for Nigerians in particular. It was no doubt a difficult year full of uncertainties. Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a new President who took over from the regime Nigerians would love to forget in a hurry, because of the level of impoverishment meted to the populace.

Now that we have come into 2024, a lot of events reflected the pulse of the nation through the course of the year.

For the first time, a new law known as the Electoral Act 2022 was put to the test. Before balloting, Nigerians were confident in the ability of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to get it right given the robust provisions in the Act.

The direct transmission of election results to the IReV portal; an initiative many Nigerians believed would drastically reduce election rigging and manipulation, was a key factor in the Act. The compliance of the IReV in the

Continued on page 31

NEWS

Gombe to fastrack development with development partners - Gov Inuwa

From WILLIE ATTAH, Gombe

GOMBE State Governor, Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya has assured of his administration's commitment to continue to work with development partners in order to align governance with the needs and aspirations of the larger population of the state.

The governor gave the assurance during a meeting with the Country Representative of PROPCOM Plus, a UK funded project, Dr Adiya Ode, at the Gombe State Governor's Lodge in Abuja.

Already, Gombe State Government is implementing some projects in conjunction with some other partners, he stated. And the governor maintained that it is aimed at meeting some core needs of the people, some of which are climate and environment related issues.

Governor Inuwa said, "We're also working with the World Bank on some similar projects such as the Livestock Productivity and Resilience Project (L-PRES), towards developing and transforming our livestock subsector".

Another project the state is implementing with a development partner, said the Governor, is "the Agro-Climate Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes (ACReSAL) Project to step up our implementation of sustainable landscape management.

"So with your coming on board, there must be a synergy in order to reap the benefits", Governor Inuwa maintained.

He noted that some of the focus areas of PROPCOM Plus are in line with his administration's agenda, especially the climate-related ones and the livestock



development aspect.

He said with its strategic location in the North East and its environmental restoration project, the Gombe Goes Green (3G) and the Wawa-Zange Grazing Reserve, there is no better place for PROPCOM Plus to forge partnership than Gombe.

"In Gombe, we have a project called, Gombe Goes Green (3G) under which we are planting at least one million trees annually in our efforts towards environmental restoration", he stressed.

While highlighting on the state's 10-year development plan, tagged DEVAGOM started in 2019, the Governor stressed the urgency of forging strategic collaboration to ensure a sustainable development and lasting legacy.

"In Gombe State, we have a clear vision. We are working with our development agenda which encapsulates our mission and vision borne out of the Needs Assessment that we carried out even before

coming into office in 2019.

"We have no option than to partner with organisations like yours and we must do it fast and well in order to leave a lasting legacy", he reiterated.

Earlier, Dr. Adiya Ode informed Governor Inuwa Yahaya that Propcom+ is UKAid's new flagship rural and agricultural market development programme aimed at supporting economic growth in conflict and climate affected regions in Nigeria by addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges in the country's food and land-use system.

She sought for partnership with Gombe State Government in the areas of sustainable agriculture and forestry that will benefit people, climate, and nature.

"The programme aims to support the people, to adopt and scale sustainable agricultural practices that increase productivity and climate resilience while reducing emissions and protecting natural

From VICTOR GAI, Jalingo

A total of 40,000 people in Taraba are set to benefit from the ongoing Livestock Productivity and Resilience Support (L-PRES) programme initiated by the federal government. 1.43 million Nigerians will as well benefit from the project.

This was disclosed during the inauguration of the Taraba State Steering Committee (SSC) and the State Technical Committee (STC) of L-PRES in Jalingo. Hananiah Albert, the State Coordinator of L-PRES, disclosed that 30 percent of the beneficiaries would be women.

The project emphasizes the state's deliberate focus on livestock value chain, including cattle, sheep, goat, and poultry, due to its advantageous position in the North-East geographical zone.

According to Albert, prospective beneficiaries range from livestock producers, feed suppliers, equipment dealers, marketers, transporters, processors, input suppliers, and off-takers.

The project aims to support livestock farmers and sector operators with extension services, animal health services, and investments in infrastructure such as the construction and

40,000 Tarabans to benefit from FG's livestock initiative

rehabilitation of livestock markets, abattoirs and slaughter slabs.

Furthermore, the initiative will facilitate the provision of manual and motorized boreholes, installation of weigh bridges and loading ramps in livestock markets, and the establishment of an Artificial Insemination (AI) Centre, among other measures.

The Commissioner, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Professor Nicholas Namessan, affirmed the project's potential to enhance livelihoods in secondary and pastoral

communities. The strategic injections of inputs and support services, championed by the World Bank, are expected to drive positive change in the state's livestock sector.

Governor Dr. Agbu Kefas, through his deputy, Alhaji Aminu Alkali, pledged a robust support for the two committees, ensuring their effective functioning in implementing the L-PRES project.

He stated that the initiative was a significant step towards fortifying the livestock sector and uplifting communities.



Kefas

Medical Team/Nema visit Bokkos

By CHRISTY TAMAI

A medical team supported by UNICEF, Red Cross, UN in company of Nigerian medical personnel, led by the Commissioner of Health, Plateau State, Dr Cletus Shurkur Bako and Professor Christopher Yilgwan paid an assessment visit to Bokkos LGC, one of the LGCs affected by the Christmas eve attack on the Plateau.

The Commissioner of Health, said the medical team had the primary task of carrying on with initial assessment of medical needs, disclosing that the team had some medical consumables for those that needed them.

He explained that that would

be a continuous process depending on the assessment. Explaining further, he said that the team had a lot of experts in various fields of health who would be attending to the people based on their needs.

He said the team was being supported by partners from the W.H.O, UNICEF, Red Cross, NEMA, National Development Primary Board, and Doctors Without Borders, among others. He pointed out that all of them were working together to ensure that all medical needs of those in camp, hospitals and outside were totally attended to.

Dr. Shurkur said the government appreciated all the contributions made by the camp manager, local government, alongside the partners.

He also said the team was willing to provide support for the three local government areas, which include Bokkos, Mangu and Barkin-Ladi, affected in terms of medications and that it would utilize other personnel of the medical team in the camp for easy assessment.

Speaking earlier was the CMD, Plateau State Specialist Hospital, Prof. Christopher Yilgwan, who explained the mission of the team which is to care for those who needed medical observation. He stated that the medical team includes mental specialists who can assist where necessary.

Prof. Yilgwan said there were also experts on child health, women, pregnant women and that anyone who was on medication and needed assistance, should avail themselves.

The CMD said the team came with some drugs for diabetics, multi-vitamins, among many.

He explained that this was the team's first visit and that what it

was doing was to help the team to evaluate the potential needs of the people.

He assured them that the team was also trying to allay the fears of the victims who might feel abandoned.

Dr. Mie said the partners were working on different assessments which made the work multi-clustered in order to collect the key information and needs in order to attend to the suffering population.

She explained that despite the fact that they were different partners, agencies, they were all working together to support the government to assist the population in need. And pointed out that the most important thing was to look at what was critical, what was most urgent and organize some things like building back better in terms of the state resilience, like building the health system to be strong enough, resilient enough to continue the care of the population in Plateau.

The Zonal Director of NEMA, Mr. Eugene Nyelong said they received the distress call from the government on the incident that happened on the 24th of December, and were directed by President

He appreciated the Executive Secretary of SEMA, and thereafter declared open the emergency operations center which he said was well coordinated by the key stakeholders on board.

The chairman, Bokkos LGA, Hon. Monday Kassa, alongside the camp manager, Mr. Ayuba Matawal, the Chief Medical Director, Alheri Nursing Home, Dung John, said they were devastated when the incident occurred but appreciated the vice president, ministers, W.H.O, UNICEF, Red Cross, NEMA, SEMA among others for the support they received and prayed for normalcy to return.

Tarok nation calls for completion of barracks

By FWENJI GO'AR

AN appeal for the completion of the abandoned Mobile Police Barracks located at Kadarko Chiefdom in Wase LGA of Plateau State has been made by the Tarok Nation, so as to facilitate prompt intervention on recurring attacks on communities within the

chiefdom. This was contained in a press statement issued to journalists and signed by the National Secretary of the Tarok Socio-Cultural Development Association (Ngwang Ishi O'Tarok - NIO).

The call was made by the Ag President Langtang joint Traditional Council and Ponzhi

Zinni HRH Nimnan Langnim at a stakeholders security meeting held at the Ponzhi Tarok Palace, Langtang recently.

According to the paramount ruler, a lot of lives and properties have been lost as a result of recurring attacks on innocent citizens at Kadarko Chiefdom.

Responding to the call made by the paramount ruler, Secretary to the Government of the state, Arc Samuel N Jatau, who was also at the meeting, promised to pass the message to the governor, on the need to follow up with the appropriate authorities to see to the completion of the project.

It is believed that the completion of the Mobile Police Barracks in Kadarko will safeguard lives and properties of the threatened communities.

The SSG also informed the meeting that he would consult with the governor on the need to provide relief materials to those who were attacked recently by unknown armed

men.

He thanked the NIO and the Langtang Joint Traditional Council for organising the meeting, primarily aimed at bringing peace and development in the Kadarko Kingdom.

Earlier in his remarks, the President, Tarok Socio-cultural Development Association (the Ngwang Ishi O'tarok NIO), Amb Nanpon Danjuma Sheni, expressed appreciation to the Governor of the state, Barr Caleb Mutfwang and the security agencies in the state for restoring relative peace and stability to communities in the state that were recently attacked by unknown armed gunmen.

Sheni debunked the insinuation making the rounds that the Tarok nation had militia groups, trained and used for attacks and counter attacks. He called on the general public to disregard such false claims.

He added that Tarok people are accommodating, peace loving and have lived in



Egbetkun

CHANGE OF NAME	
ADAMU	ABDULKARIM
I, formerly known as ADAMU NAOMI IBRAHIM , now wish to be known and addressed as ADAMU ZAINAB IBRAHIM . All former documents remain valid. All concerned authorities and the general public to please take note.	I, formerly known as ADAM MOHAMMED ABDULKARI , now wish to be known and addressed as ABDULKARIM MUHAMMADU ADAMU . All former documents remain valid. All concerned authorities and the general public to please

Feature

Tinubu and the renewed zest of anti-graft war

Corruption is an insidious scourge. It is an anti-social attitude awarding improper privileges contrary to legal and moral norms, and impairs the authorities' capacity to secure the welfare of all citizens. The effect of the corruption menace on the economic prospects of Nigeria is huge. Clearly, Nigeria is positioned to lead the rest of Africa to glory, and serve as a source of pride for the black race. GIDADO IBRAHIM writes.

BUT corruption has stagnated these expectations and reduced the most populous country in Africa to a clayfeet giant. Corruption runs through every level of the Nigerian government. From considerable contract fraud at the top, petty bribery, money laundering schemes, embezzlement to seizing salaries from fake workers, it is estimated that corruption within the state apparatus costs the country billions of dollars annually.

However, President Bola Tinubu's May 2023 inauguration was marked by bold promises of zero tolerance for corruption. Cynics had dismissed them as mere rhetoric, echoing Nigerians' past disappointments with unfulfilled anti-graft pledges. But the Tinubu government has demonstrated a different approach, one governed by reward and consequence. Appointees who deliver are supported, while those who falter face repercussions. This renewed anti-graft zeal has sparked cautious optimism among Nigerians.

The president had launched National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) focused on five pillars which serve as the driving force for both the public and private sectors: prevention of corruption, public engagement, campaign for ethical re-orientation, enforcement and sanction, as well as recovery and management of proceeds of crime.

To ensure effective deliverables, the office of the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and minister of justice has been charged with critical performance indicators which will ensure percentage implementation of the NACS and the coordination of mechanisms involved in the anti-corruption efforts. To this end, a performance bond was signed by the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Lattef Fagbemi (SAN), on November 3, 2023.

By all standards, the renewed zest of anti-graft war under the Renewed Hope Agenda of the Tinubu administration is a confirmation of the famous pledge by the First Lady, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, during the Independence Thanksgiving Service at the National Ecumenical Christian Centre, Abuja.

She declared: "Nigeria's wealth is the commonwealth of all, it belongs to everyone. God has blessed my family; we don't need the wealth of Nigeria to survive but to do the right thing and I promise you that with your help, and with the help of God, we will set this nation on the right path."

A defining moment came with the raid by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Dangote headquarters and other prominent firms,



Tinubu

investigating the use of foreign exchange allocated for industrialisation. This signaled a shift away from business as usual, suggesting Tinubu's intent to tackle the stranglehold of the "one percent class" who have historically misused resources meant for development.

When I learnt that the Ola Olukoyede-led EFCC raided the Dangote headquarters and other bigwigs' firms to interrogate the utilisation of foreign exchange allocated by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) for industrialisation, I knew that it was no longer business as usual. It is becoming evident that Tinubu is on a mission to "bail Nigeria out" from the economic stranglehold of one percent 'Class of Deep Pockets' whom over the decades, mangled the petro-dollars allocated to them for industrial development, hence failed to lift millions out of poverty.

It is heart-wrenching that one percent class had been feeding fat on the sordid-forex market. Tinubu's courage must be commended for committing the ageless thesis of class suicide, albeit, because the president himself can be classified as a member of the upper class.

Needless to reiterate that corruption strives against government's business arrangements and family loyalties dominate governmental appointments paving the way for politicians, officials, and their business associates, who together make up the ruling elite, to ensure that they all become wealthy through behind-the-scene agreements and the awarding of profitable contracts to favoured supporters.

The swift manner with which the president suspended the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and

Poverty Alleviation, Betta Edu, over scandalous transfer of N585.2 million into a private bank account smacks of a leader on a mission to recalibrate Nigeria's anti-graft trajectory.

President Tinubu has also given marching orders to the EFCC for thorough investigation, with the aim of prosecuting the culprits. Most heart-warming is the fact that this development is coming few weeks after an investigative panel report on the CBN was submitted to the president.

Now that it has become obvious that his anti-graft crusade is not a hoax, after all, Tinubu should mandate the anti-graft agencies not to ignore calls by civil society organisations to investigate some past and present government's official over some social intervention programmes like the N60 billion funds meant to procure cell phones for farmers by the President Goodluck Jonathan administration in 2013.

Other fraudulent social intervention programmes and projects by past administrations that need to be revisited for investigation include the \$16 billion meant for power project; \$500 million for cassava bread; \$443 million for CCTV cameras in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT); \$2.2 billion arms deal funds, and N100 billion for cooking stoves, among others.

For instance, the Human and Environmental Agenda Resource Centre has called on the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to conduct a thorough investigation into the tenure of the former Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami (SAN), over several allegations of corruption and abuse of office against him.

Needless to buttress that the

immediate-past Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Sadiya Umar-Farouq, is facing EFCC's grilling over N37 billion fraud allegations. What this shows is that there's no sacred cow under the Tinubu administration.

The swift suspension of the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Betta Edu, over a N585.2 million scandal, followed by an EFCC investigation, further underscores Tinubu's resolve. This action, coming shortly after an investigative panel's report on the CBN, demonstrates a commitment to tackling corruption regardless of position or past promises.

While some initiatives show promise, challenges remain. Critics have raised concerns about potential political motivations behind certain investigations, highlighting the need for transparency and fairness. Weak whistleblower protection and judicial system bottlenecks pose further obstacles.

When Tinubu drew the red lines upon assumption of office on May 29, 2023, for official corruption, not too many Nigerians gave him a chance. In fact, cynics dismissed his brags with a wave of the hand, saying, "Na today", to borrow a popular slang from the Nigerian local parlance. Conversely, it will be unfair to blame Nigerians, who carpeted the president's avowed fight against corruption, because of the serial broken promises of successive Nigerian governments to fight the cancer called corruption to the barest minimum.

To the utter disappointment of naysayers and cynics, the Tinubu government has proven that its style of administration is governed by reward and

punishment. Appointees who do well are given more support to deliver even more but those who slack will be booted out. So far, the anti-graft fight is receiving a new lifeline. I can safely posit that President Tinubu's anti-graft war is "Hope Renewal" and taking sides with the Nigerian masses.

The success of Nigeria's anti-graft war will depend on sustained political will, robust institutional reforms, and active citizen engagement. Only by dismantling the deep-rooted web of corruption, ensuring fair investigations and prosecutions, and fostering public participation can Nigeria truly turn hope into lasting progress.

There are still other agencies that Nigerians would be more comfortable to see the president ordering a thorough investigation on their activities. The anti-graft agencies should quickly revisit the manner in which funds released for the sugar infrastructure development was utilised. If utilised effectively, the funds would have enhanced sugar refining and put an end to the importation of sugar.

President Tinubu should also review the crude oil collateral loan. If collateral is "security pledged for the payment of a loan," then there is a big question mark over the 15,000 barrels per day (bpd) crude oil allocation ceded as the collateral. Nigerians are eagerly waiting to hear the outcome of investigations of those who looted public funds and their open trial just as it is done in the United States of America, where former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden trials are open for the benefit of that country.

While it's still too early to definitively assess the success of President Tinubu's anti-graft efforts, there are promising signs. The NACS provides a comprehensive framework, and the increased focus on transparency and accountability is commendable. However, addressing concerns about selectivity, strengthening whistleblower protection, and reforming the judicial system are crucial for long-term success.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of Nigeria's anti-graft fight will depend on sustained political will, robust institutional reforms, and active citizen engagement. Only by tackling corruption at its roots can Nigeria hope to achieve sustainable development and prosperity for all its citizens.

It's important to note that the fight against corruption is a complex and long-term endeavour. While President Tinubu's efforts show promise, sustained commitment and a multifaceted approach are essential for lasting success. Nigerians must remain vigilant, demand accountability, and actively participate in holding their leaders to the highest ethical standards.

FEATURE

Many sins of Pastor TB Joshua?

As a posthumous honour, that title sits well on Pastor Temitope Balogun Joshua like his Afro hair. In the light of recent revelations resulting from a thorough Investigative report by the BBC Africa Eye, the founder of Synagogue Church of All Nations was a master manipulator who cast a spell on those who knelt before him. MICHAEL JIMOH write.

ON their feet, they marveled at the miracles he could perform. Even from a distance, they wondered at how much he knew, how - at a stretch of his hands - all manner of affliction will simply disappear from a diseased body.

And the afflicted came in their thousands from all over the world, the UK, Korea, South Africa, Germany, Uganda. At least two sitting presidents of African countries made a pilgrimage to genuflect before the man of God. One or two Nollywood has-beens rolled from one end to the other on the tiled floor of his magnificent church at Ikotun Lagos.

Others came on recommendation from some who visited for a miracle cure.

Once you see him," they reassured the infirm in body and soul, "you're as good as cured."

To say that thousands and thousands of worshippers at SCOAN were besotted with TB Joshua is an understatement. Men were grateful to run errands for him - no matter how lowly.

Agomoh Paul, a sort of Man Friday and second in command called his principal a genius, a man who planned everything in detail and he never ever failed, whether in his sham miracles or the women he seduced.

Women - of all nations - dotted on his every word. With his beguiling smile and genial manner reminiscent of a family doctor, TB Joshua passed himself off as a physician of the body and soul to many of his followers. They believed him.

But his public persona of an avuncular philanthropist and all round healer was totally at variance with the private man.

From the confessions and revelations of dozens of women interviewed by the Beeb, the picture emerging is that of a sex fiend who had his way whether the women in question liked it or not. It has also been disclosed he had a predilection for virgins procured for him by a team of scouts at his service.

Bisola a Nigerian lady claimed TB Joshua raped her serially, resulting in abortions.

A worse fate befell some of them who were subjected to psychological torture and physical abuse. Rae, a Briton, was about the same age as the girl from Southern Africa when she made a trans-Atlantic flight from London in 2012 to SCOAN to meet Joshua. It was the beginning of a sex ordeal and captivity she never ever imagined. Hoping for paradise in Joshua's church for all nations, Rae found instead hell in the private hands of the very man she had idolized, the very man she'd seen as a cure to her ailment.

She was gay and so she wanted to be



TB Joshua

normal. TB Joshua literally turned her into a sex slave.

Speaking of the ugly turn of events, Rae's friend, Carla, told the Beeb that she failed to rescue her friend.

"I left her there," says Carla, tears flowing freely. "Never will I ever forgive myself for that. For me, it was like she died, but I couldn't grieve her."

There have been similarly disturbing testimonies from other victims of the man of God. More than 25 eyewitnesses and alleged victims, from the UK, Nigeria, Ghana, US, South Africa and Germany, have provided accounts of what it was like inside Joshua's compound, with the most recent experiences in 2019.

"Testimony from dozens of survivors suggests Joshua was abusing and raping young women from around the world several times a week for nearly 20 years" and "many of the victims said it happened frequently - as much as two to four times a

week - for the duration of their time in the compound. Some described violent rapes which left them struggling to breathe or bleeding."

Unsurprisingly, the scandal swirling around the late preacher has been trending ever since it broke yesterday.

It has also elicited criticism from Netizens. Former Minister of Aviation Femi Fani-Kayode has spoken in support of the late preacher, panning the BBC documentary. Some others have seen through the sham preachers like Joshua are for taking advantage of gullible worshippers.

To be sure, the TB Joshua sex scandal isn't the first time televangelists will be involved in such mess. There was the case of Jimmy Swaggart and Jimmy Baker. Back in the seventies Reverend Jimmy Jones encouraged his disciples to commit mass suicide in a Guyanese forest.

For some inexplicable reasons,

supposed men of God have always had a peculiar hold over those who go to them for succor. Along the line, they sexually exploit their vulnerability. TB Joshua's is just one of the many atrocities supposed men of God commit.

Reacting to the report, Public Affairs Director of SCOAN, Dare Adejumo, said BBC has clearly "harmed its own reputation through its compromised and unprofessional journalism."

He said, "BBC has compromised these lofty principles by descending into fictional narratives and propaganda, thus turning itself into a weapon for a hatchet job as gangsters in the gab of journalism with a destructive ulterior motive for personal gains against a perceived enemy."

This to say the least, is insulting to our professional and public intelligence.

One thing is very obvious, hundreds of BBC charades cannot rubbush the indelible footprints of TB Joshua's legacies on earth again."

According to the Church, there are numerous individuals who have experienced astonishing miracles and greatly benefited from the anointing and grace bestowed upon them by the Lord through TB Joshua.

It said these beneficiaries can be found everywhere, and their existence cannot be disputed.

SCOAN observed that many of the individuals reside in the UK, which is the home base of BBC. It, however, expressed regret that the biased investigative eyes of BBC fail to acknowledge their presence and instead rely on obviously biased narrators.

"Reacting to the report, Public Affairs Director of SCOAN, Dare Adejumo, said BBC has clearly "harmed its own reputation through its compromised and unprofessional journalism." He said, "BBC has compromised these lofty principles by descending into fictional narratives and propaganda, thus turning itself into a weapon for a hatchet job as gangsters in the gab of journalism with a destructive ulterior motive for personal gains against a perceived enemy.."

Continued from previous publication

PROS AND CONS: The pros of starting a small social media management business with AI analytics include high demand for social media services, low startup costs, and the ability to work from anywhere. However, the cons have increased competition and the constant need to stay updated with the latest social media trends and AI tools.

Influencer Partnership Platform: Starting an Influencer Partnership Platform can cost between \$10,000 and \$50,000, covering development, marketing, and initial influencer outreach. The rise of social media has led to the emergence of influencers. You can start a small business that connects brands with influencers for promotional campaigns.

What do I need to do? To start an influencer partnership platform, you must build a network of influencers and brands. You must also develop a platform where brands can find and connect with influencers. What's The Profitability Opportunity? The profitability of an influencer partnership platform depends on the number of brands and influencers you serve, the rates you charge, and your operational efficiency. By offering a reliable and efficient platform, you can attract more brands and influencers and charge premium rates, making it among the best online business ideas.

Timeline: Depending on your existing network and resources, setting up an influencer partnership platform can take several months to a year. What's the Investment Commitment? The initial investment for an influencer partnership platform is relatively moderate. You'll need to invest in developing a platform and marketing your services.

Pros and Cons: The pros of starting an influencer partnership platform include the high demand for influencer marketing services, the potential for high profit margins, and the ability to work from anywhere. However, the cons have increased competition and the constant need to attract and retain brands and influencers.

Digital Branding Consultancy: Starting a Digital Branding Consultancy can cost between \$5,000 and \$20,000, covering branding, marketing, and initial outreach. Branding is crucial for the success of any business. Most successful small businesses start as digital branding consultancies that help small businesses build and strengthen their digital brand while growing their graphic design capacities.

What do I need to do? To start a small business digital branding consultancy, you must deeply understand branding and digital marketing. You also need to build a team of branding experts and digital marketers.

What's The Profitability Opportunity? The profitability of a digital branding consultancy depends on the number of clients you serve, the rates you charge, and your operational efficiency. By offering high-quality, customized services, you can attract more clients, charge premium rates, and move from operating a small business from your home to your office.

Timeline: Setting up a digital branding consultancy can take several months to a year, depending on your existing knowledge and resources.

What's the Investment Commitment? The initial investment for a digital branding consultancy is relatively moderate. You'll need to invest in branding and digital marketing tools and hire branding experts and digital marketers.

Pros and Cons: The pros of starting a digital branding consultancy include high

demand for branding services, potential for high profit margins, and the ability to work from anywhere. However, the cons have increased competition and the need to constantly stay updated with the latest branding and digital marketing trends.

SEO Optimization Firm using AI Tools: Starting an AI-powered SEO Optimization Firm can cost between \$10,000 and \$30,000, including tools, website development, marketing, and initial outreach. Search engine optimization (SEO) is crucial for improving a website's visibility on search engines. You can start an SEO optimization firm that uses AI tools to deliver data-driven results.

Hope is not lost



What do I need to do? To start an SEO optimization firm with AI tools, you must deeply understand SEO and AI analytics tools. You also need to build a team of SEO experts and data analysts. What's The Profitability Opportunity? The profitability of an SEO optimization firm with AI analytics depends on the number of clients you serve, the rates you charge, and your operational efficiency. You can attract more clients and charge premium rates by offering high-quality, data-driven services.

Timeline: Setting up an SEO optimization firm with AI analytics can be relatively quick. However, building a client base and a reputation in the market can take several months to a year. What's the Investment Commitment? The initial investment for an SEO optimization firm with AI analytics is relatively low. You'll need to invest in SEO and AI analytics tools and hire SEO experts and data analysts.

Pros and Cons: The pros of starting an SEO optimization firm with AI analytics include high demand for SEO services, low startup costs, and the ability to work from anywhere. However, the cons have increased competition and constant need to stay updated with the latest SEO trends and AI tools.

Virtual Event Planning Business: Starting a Virtual Event Planning Business can cost between \$2,000 and \$10,000, covering essential tools, marketing, and initial planning resources. The rise of virtual events has created new opportunities for event planners. You can start a virtual event planning company that helps businesses plan and execute successful virtual events.

What do I need to do? To start a virtual event planning company, you must deeply understand event planning and



team of advertising experts and market researchers.

What's The Profitability Opportunity? The profitability of a niche market advertising agency depends on the number of clients you serve, the rates you charge, and your operational efficiency. You can attract more clients and charge premium rates by offering specialized, high-quality services.

Timeline: Setting up a niche market advertising agency can take several months to a year, depending on your existing knowledge and resources.

What's the Investment Commitment? The initial investment for a niche market advertising agency is relatively moderate. You'll need to invest in advertising tools and hire advertising experts and market researchers.

Pros and Cons: The pros of starting a niche market advertising agency include the high demand for specialized advertising services, the potential for high-profit margins, and the ability to differentiate yourself from general advertising agencies. However, the cons include the challenge of understanding and targeting specific niches and the need to constantly stay updated with the latest advertising trends and niche market insights.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Solutions: Launching a CRM Solutions business can cost \$10,000 to \$50,000, covering software, marketing, and initial client acquisition's solutions are crucial for improving customer relationships and increasing customer retention. You can start a business that provides CRM solutions to businesses.

What do I need to do? To start a CRM solutions business, you must deeply understand CRM systems and customer relationship management. You also need to build a team of CRM experts and software developers.

What's The Profitability Opportunity? The profitability of a CRM solutions business depends on the number of clients you serve, the rates you charge, and your operational efficiency. You can attract more clients and charge premium rates by offering customized CRM solutions.

Timeline: Setting up a CRM solutions business can take several months to a year, depending on your existing knowledge and resources.

What's the Investment Commitment? The initial investment for a CRM solutions business is relatively high. You'll need to invest in CRM software and hire CRM experts and software developers.

Pros and Cons: The pros of starting a CRM solutions business include the high demand for CRM solutions, the potential for high-profit margins, and the ability to differentiate yourself from generic software solutions providers. However, the cons have high startup costs and the need to constantly stay updated with the latest CRM trends and software developments.

What do I need to do? To start a niche market advertising agency, you need to understand advertising and niche markets deeply. You also need to build a

Concluded

WHOSE words are you going to believe? When you believe Satan's words, his lies and intimidation, then you shut the door for God's power to operate. What does God say? He says do not be afraid. You may be tempted to, it may look hopeless and it may look like there is no way out but remember; there is nothing that earth has to offer you that heaven cannot beat a thousand times over.

So, how do we hook up to God's provision, protection, preservation and divine interventions? The basis on which we hook up to God is by believing His word. Amos 3:3 says it this way; can two walk together, except they be agreed? God's words are superior than the devil's word just as God's power is superior to the devil's power. God himself is superior to the devil and that superiority manifests itself in the fact that when God's power is at work, it cancels, neutralizes and uproots anything that the devil is doing.

There is no disease that God cannot heal, no situation God cannot rectify. There is no situation so dark or hopeless that the power of God cannot get involved in and change. The thing is understanding the spirituality of life and how that life is governed by words and as you hook up to the right words which are God's word, you open the door for that divine power to begin to flow in your circumstance and you will see before your eyes, natural human impossibilities, turned around to become divine possibilities.

Getting God to be involved in your life is not as hard as many people think it to be. Make your choice to day between trusting God and being afraid.

Isaiah 12:2 says, Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. God is my salvation, He is my deliverance, my welfare, my rescue, my safety, my protection, my preservation and the timely help that I need. Now whatever your circumstance, the scriptures say; see that God is the solution that you need.

The ord salvation is the Hebrew word, Yeshua. This is the title that Jesus occupies in his Messianic office as redeemer and saviour. So literarily the scripture is saying, look and see the salvation that God has made available to you is only found

in Yeshua; the Lord Jesus Christ. This verse goes further to say; I will trust and not be afraid. That means that the only way I can defeat the fear of whatever it is that I am faced with is to trust in the salvation made available through Yeshua, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus came to the earth, died and was raised

I believe with the whole of my heart that Isaiah 12:2 will be your testimony as you refuse to be afraid and choose rather to channel your energies toward trusting God. When you trust God, you will see the marvelous power of God come to your rescue again and again; He will deliver you and put a testimony and



Fear not trust God (28)



from the dead victorious, that was the only thing that broke the devil's power. There is no force on earth that can contend with the devil's and defeat him outside of the power of God. However, the good news is that once you become a believer by giving your life to the Lord Jesus Christ; that same power that raised Jesus from the dead is made available to you.

Now there is no such thing as a disease that cannot be healed, a question in your life that cannot be answered or a need that cannot be met if you factor in the power of God.

Satan has broken forth upon the earth today bringing great cause for fear. There is almost no nation on the earth that is not going through one kind of crisis or the other. Human beings are at a loss for what to do and wondering about how life would go on a national and individual scale. But the bible says that the answer to any fear is putting faith and trust in the salvation that the Lord Jesus Christ has brought to this earth through His death and resurrection. Today, refuse to be afraid and choose to trust God.

a song upon your lips.

Now, by way of quick recap, we have established certain things about the spirit of fear. First of all, we said that fear is a spirit. 2nd Timothy 1:7 says For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Fear is not just a reaction you feel but a spirit and it began to operate in this world when Adam sinned and the curse and death came into this world.

Secondly, we established that Satan can do nothing outside the operation of the spirit of fear. This is why the Bible encourages us to refuse to be afraid but trust God because as we trust him, we shut down the operation of the spirit of fear and Satan is literarily

stripped of any ability he may have to inflict harm in our lives.

Thirdly, we established that fear manifests itself in the life of a human being through thoughts, suggestions and ideas. Fear operates as we wrongly interpret our circumstance and attempt to get help for our lives without God. Proverbs 3:5-6 makes it very clear. It says; trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. If you would trust Him with all your heart; acknowledge Him or consider how mighty He is and consider how He has been your deliverance in the

past, then His power will be deployed in our circumstance to make a way for you where there seemed to be no way.

I am reminded of the children of Israel when they were delivered from Egypt and were face to face with the red sea. They cried to Moses saying you should have left us to die in the hands of the Egyptians. Sometimes, when you are faced with circumstances and there seems to be no way out, remember that God saw a path in the sea and knew exactly what He was going to do. Where the Israelites did not see a way out, God saw a way out and a path in the mighty waters.

As Moses trusted in God's direction and instructions, God's power was deployed to do something that had never been done before on the earth. That was the first time in man's recorded history that the power of God parted a massive sea and allowed the children of Israel to pass through on dry ground.

I tell you the truth; God has not forgotten how to part red seas. Just remember that only the power of God, not man's reasoning can do that. Whenever you are faced with a situation you have never been faced with, you are about to see a deliverance you have never seen before.

As you choose to trust God today, that red sea will part. You will see the marvels and the wonders of Almighty God. Not only will He deliver you, but God will promote you and put a new song of victory upon your lips. Find out today from God's word what he has said about your circumstance and believe it and chose not to fear.

“
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 ”

INTERNATIONAL

Ecuador president defies gangs to take on army

Ecuaorean President Daniel Noboa has challenged armed gangs to take on the military rather than civilians as soldiers were deployed to combat the criminal groups.

Mr Noboa declared a state of emergency on Monday after a wave of gang violence swept through the Andean country.

In the most dramatic incident, armed men stormed a TV station and threatened the staff during a live broadcast.

More than 300 suspects have been arrested under the state of emergency.

Mr Noboa struck a defiant tone in a radio interview on Wednesday.

The 36-year-old president, who has only been in power for two months, challenged the gangs. "Be brave, fight the soldiers," he told them, referring to the fact that most of those who have been targeted by the gangs have been civilians or unarmed prison guards.

At least 14 people have been killed in recent days as gang members set off explosive devices, burned vehicles and kidnapped police officers on duty.

One hundred and fifty-eight prison guards and 20 employees working for the prison system have also been taken hostage by inmates, officials said. An armed forces commander said on Wednesday that so far none of the hostages been killed.

President Noboa said Ecuador was living through "a very tough moment" but insisted that his government would be tough on the gangs and "any judges or prosecutors who

Daniel Noboa was elected last year after another presidential candidate was assassinated

The current surge in attacks appears to have been kicked off by an attempt to transfer the notorious gang leader known as "Fito" from the jail which he largely controlled to a prison which is considered more secure.

But when police entered his cell in the Regional jail on Sunday, they found it abandoned.



Noboa

News of his escape triggered riots in other jails, during which Fabricio Colón Pico, who is one of the leaders of the Los Lobos gang, also absconded.

Neither Fito, whose real name is Adolfo Macías Villareal, nor Colón Pico have so far been tracked down. The Ecuadorean government has offered a reward for information leading to their capture. They are also offering rewards for 17 other gang leaders.

Ecuador, which until recently was a relatively safe country compared to the rest of the region, saw its murder rate more than quadruple between 2018 and 2022 as criminal gangs linked to drug trafficking became more powerful.

President Noboa declared 22 of these groups "terrorist gangs" on Tuesday and decreed that his country was involved in an "internal armed conflict".

Ecuador's Congress has unanimously approved the measure, which allows soldiers to

be deployed to patrol the streets and to search homes for weapons and suspects.

Soldiers were guarding the presidential palace in Quito on Wednesday

The BBC's Will Grant who is in Guayaquil, the port city worst hit by the recent violence, says its residents are still struggling to make sense of the gang rampage.

One of the journalists who lived through the storming of the TC television studios in Guayaquil told **Ecuadorean news site Primicias** how the gunmen threatened her and her colleagues.

She described how the armed men demanded that the presenter make an announcement live on air.

"They wanted my colleague to say: 'The mafia is in power, the president can't beat us.'" But she added that the gunmen did not have any clear demands beyond that.

The gang was eventually overpowered by the police, which

BRTAIN'S Prime Minister Rishi Sunak leaves 10 Downing Street to attend the weekly session of Prime Ministers Questions in parliament, in London,

U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is visiting Kyiv on Friday to announce a new package of support for Ukraine, including an increase in military funding for its war with Russia, a statement from his office said.

Sunak is expected to announce that military funding for Ukraine for the next financial year will be 2.5 billion pounds (\$3.2 billion), the statement said. The funding would cover long-range missiles, air defense, artillery and ammunition and maritime security.

"I am here today with one message: the U.K. will also not falter," Sunak said. "We will stand with Ukraine, in their darkest hours and in the better times to come."

Sunak first visited Ukraine in November 2022, soon after he became prime minister. Britain has been one of Ukraine's most vocal backers.

Britain is the second-biggest donor of military aid to Ukraine after the U.S., giving a total of 4.6 billion pounds (\$3.3 billion) in 2022 and 2023.

Sunak's visit came hours after the British and U.S. militaries bombed Yemen, hitting more than a dozen sites used by the Iranian-backed Houthis.

Thursday's strikes were a reminder of another war, which has raged for years in the Arab world's poorest nation. The attack also risked triggering a wider regional conflict over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Those concerns have drawn attention away from Ukraine's struggle — a shift that Zelenskyy is trying to counter

UK Prime Minister to visit Kyiv

through diplomacy.

Both Ukraine and Russia are scrambling to replenish their weapons after 22 months of fighting and the potential for a protracted conflict. The roughly 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line has been largely static during winter, and both Ukraine and Russia require artillery shells, missiles and drones that enable long-range strikes.

Ukraine says Moscow is receiving artillery shells and missiles from North Korea and Iran. On Jan. 4, the White House cited U.S. intelligence officials as saying that Russia acquired ballistic missiles from North Korea and is seeking them from Iran.

Ukraine's leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is pushing Kyiv's Western allies to provide Ukraine with more support on top of the billions of dollars in military aid the country has already received.

This week he visited three small Baltic countries — Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia — in search of new pledges. The eastern European countries, which are also amongst Kyiv's staunchest supporters,

promised more missiles, drones, howitzers and artillery shells.

Zelenskyy has warned that Ukraine particularly needs air defense systems to fend off Russian aerial barrages. Recent massive Russian barrages — more than 500 drones and missiles were fired between Dec. 29 and Jan. 2, according to officials in Kyiv — are using up Ukraine's air defense resources and leaving it vulnerable.

Sunak said that the U.K. recognises that Ukrainian security "is our security."

"Today we are going further — increasing our military aid, delivering thousands of cutting-edge drones, and signing a historic new Security Agreement to provide Ukraine with the assurances it needs for the long term," he said.

Support for Ukraine's war effort is sputtering. A plan by the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden to send \$60 billion in new funding to Kyiv is being held up in Congress. Europe's pledge in March to provide 1 million artillery shells within 12 months has also fallen short, with only about 300,000 delivered by the end of last year.



Lai

China warns voters then condemns US 'brazen chattering'

WILLIAM Lai of the DPP says he's defending democracy but has angered China in the past with comments about independence

China has warned voters in Taiwan to make the "right choice", two days before presidential elections on the self-ruled island which Beijing claims.

A win for the ruling party candidate William Lai would pose a danger to relations, China said.

It also criticised "brazen chattering" by the US after Washington warned Beijing not to stoke tensions ahead of Saturday's vote.

Who wins the poll could push the island further towards, or away from, Beijing.

Taiwan is a key flashpoint in the tussle between China and the US for supremacy in Asia.

China's Taiwan Affairs office said Mr Lai would further promote separatist activities if he were elected.

Mr Lai, of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), has called for voters to "choose the right path" to maintain Taiwan's sovereignty.

His main opponent, Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang (KMT), has called Mr Lai a danger to relations with China. IMAGE

Many Taiwanese consider themselves to be part of a separate nation - although most are in favour of maintaining the status quo where Taiwan neither declares independence from China nor unites with it.

The island sees itself as distinct from the mainland - but China's government says it is a breakaway province that will, eventually, be part of the country, and has not ruled out the use of force to achieve this.

Lai had been narrowly in front in the presidential race before polling stopped on 2 January. Parliamentary elections are also being held.

China's message to voters came

as it told the US to stop commenting on the election.

The foreign ministry in Beijing issued a sharp rebuke to Washington after the US said it would send an unofficial delegation to Taiwan after the vote.

The US government must "refrain from intervening in the elections... so as to avoid causing serious damage to US-China relations", a spokesperson said.

China "expresses... resolute opposition to the American side's brazen chattering about the elections in the Taiwan region".

Beijing has said Taiwan's voters face a choice between peace and war in the elections.

On Thursday's Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu criticised China for its "repeated interference" in Saturday's vote.

"Frankly, Beijing should stop messing with other countries' elections & hold their own," Mr Wu posted on X, the social platform formerly known as Twitter.

Trump accuses attorney general of bias in court

FORMER US President Donald Trump has used Joe Biden, in the November closing arguments in his civil election.

Judge Arthur Engoron, who is ruling on what penalties to impose on Trump after an earlier decision that he and his company had manipulated property values fraudulently, allowed Trump to make brief additional comments after his lawyer had spoken.

Trump quickly took the chance to attack the New York state attorney general, saying, "They want to make sure I never win again. The [attorney general] hates Trump ... and if I can't talk about that it's a disservice."

Former US President Donald Trump attends the closing arguments in the Trump Organisation civil fraud trial at New York State Supreme Court in the Manhattan borough of New York City [Shannon Stapleton/Reuters]

James brought the case and is looking for a nearly \$370m ruling and a lifetime ban on Trump from the state's real estate industry.

But Engoron attempted to interrupt Trump with a warning to wrap up his comments, to which the

former president responded, "You have your own agenda, you can't listen for more than one minute".

The trial is one of multiple criminal and civil cases Trump faces as he seeks to return to the White House, ranging from a rape allegation to conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election.

On the final day of the trial, Engoron was sceptical of Kise's argument that Trump should not be penalised for allegedly manipulating the value of his properties because lenders and insurance still turned a profit.

Throughout the trial, the state's lawyers have looked to prove that Trump consistently overvalued many of the towers, golf clubs, and other assets that he had before he entered politics.

In November last year, Trump admitted to providing inaccurate property valuations.

From 2011-2015 defendants added a 30 percent premium because the property was a 'completed [commercial] facility,'" the filing said.

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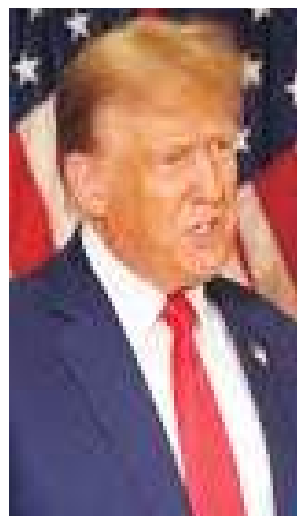
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But Trump's lawyer, Kise, argued that while there could be errors in Trump's corporate financial statements, they do not "lead to the conclusion there was fraud".

Trump is also scheduled to go on trial in Washington in March for conspiring to overturn the 2020 elections and in May for taking troves of highly classified documents in his belongings after he left the



Trump

INTERNATIONAL

What is South Africa's case against Israel at the ICJ?

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has been asked to consider whether Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. RAFFI BERG writes.

SOUTH Africa brought the case to the court. Israel has strongly rejected the allegation, calling it "baseless".

Based in the Hague, in the Netherlands, it was established after World War Two, to settle disputes between states and give advisory opinions on legal matters, which is what it is being asked to do with Israel.

Unlike the International Criminal Court (ICC), the ICJ cannot prosecute individuals for crimes of the utmost severity, such as genocide.

But its opinions carry weight with the UN and other international institutions.

The ICJ will deliver an opinion on the genocide allegation as the case is not a criminal trial

Hundreds of Hamas gunmen crossed from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel, killing 1,300 people, mainly civilians, and taking about 240 hostages back to Gaza.

Since Israel launched its military campaign against Hamas in response, more than 23,000 people, mainly women and children, have been killed in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

And evidence **submitted by South Africa** claims "acts and omissions" by Israel "are genocidal in character because they are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group".

This refers both to what Israel is actively doing, such as carrying out air strikes, and what it is allegedly failing to do, such as, according to South Africa, preventing harm to civilians.

And the case highlights Israeli public rhetoric, including comments from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as evidence of "genocidal intent".

Under international law, **genocide is defined as**



committing one or more acts with the intention to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.

Those acts are:

- killing or causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- imposing measures intended

to prevent births within the group

· forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

Mr Netanyahu said: "No, South Africa, it is not we who have come to perpetrate genocide, it is Hamas.

"It would murder all of us if it could.

"In contrast, the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] is acting as morally as possible."

Israel's military says it takes a

raft of measures to avoid civilian casualties.

These have included: airdropping flyers warning of imminent attacks

· calling civilians' phones to urge them to leave targeted buildings

· aborting some strikes when civilians are in the way

And the Israeli government has repeatedly stated its intention is to destroy Hamas, not the Palestinian people.

A spokesperson for UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said Mr Sunak believed South Africa's case was "completely unjustified and wrong."

"This legal action does not serve the court of peace. The UK government stands by Israel's clear right to defend itself within the framework of international law."

South Africa wants the ICJ to order Israel to "immediately suspend its military operations in and against Gaza".

But it is virtually certain Israel would disregard such an order and could not be made to comply.

Rulings are theoretically legally binding on parties to the ICJ - which include Israel and South Africa - but in practice, unenforceable.

In 2022, the ICJ ordered Russia to "immediately suspend military operations" in Ukraine - but the order was ignored.

· Israel says war expected to continue throughout 2024

When will there be a decision?

The ICJ could rule quickly on South Africa's request for Israel to

suspend its military campaign.

This would, in theory, protect the Palestinians from what might ultimately be declared genocide.

But a final ruling on whether Israel is committing genocide could take several years.

There have been several pro-Palestinian rallies in South Africa. South Africa has been highly critical of Israel's military operation in Gaza.

And as a signatory to the **UN's 1948 Genocide Convention**, it has an obligation to act, it says.

The governing African National Congress also has a long history of solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

It sees parallels with its struggle against apartheid - a policy of racial segregation and discrimination enforced by the white-minority government in South Africa against the country's black majority, until the first democratic elections, in 1994.

The country condemned the 7 October attacks and called for the release of the hostages.

"Our opposition to the ongoing slaughter of the people of Gaza has driven us as a country to approach the ICJ," said President Cyril Ramaphosa. "As a people who once tasted the bitter fruits of dispossession, discrimination, racism and state-sponsored violence, we are clear that we will stand on the right side of history."

· Israel-Hamas conflict exposes South Africa's divisions

Additional reporting by Damian Zane.



Ramaphosa.



God has been faithful - Ernest Dades



Can you tell me a little about yourself?
My name is Ernest Dades, an indigene of Plateau state (From Quan Pan LGA) I am married to Rita Yakzum (Now Rita Dades), blessed with two boys: Shalom Dades who is 19 years currently studying Engineering in America and Jayden Annabi Dades whom the Lord surprised us with after 19 years of waiting on him. He was born a week ago. I am a graduate of the university of Abuja as well as a Theologian with a Master's Degree in Divinity. I am a one-time Senior Special Assistant to the Governor of Plateau State (2016-2019)

You have been in the gospel music industry for decades now, how has it been?
Yeah, my first album was released on the 11th of June 1995 (About 27 years ago) while I was very small then. The journey has been so interesting because it's been a long walk with



God and still counting. It is difficult to summarize 27 years experience in a paragraph but I would like to say that God has been faithful because his presence has been heavy upon me all through. Sometimes it's stormy and sometimes sweet

An interesting aspect of it is that your songs are always fresh, it means more work to get it done abi?

Songs that are received from the throne of God will always be fresh. It is a combination of spending time in God's presence, spending time during rehearsals and so on.

Are Gospel musicians really prospering in this part of Nigeria?

Prosperity to me is relative because in the kingdom it entails so many things. In this part of the country Gospel musicians are very mindful of spirituality and once that is taking care of, every other thing shall be added. Mathew 6:33. Yes, we are prospering.

Many people who listen to radio have heard one nice reggae song making waves in the country; are you related to this young chap?

Yes, that's my biological son Shalom Dades who is in Baltimore U.S.A studying.

It's like music runs in your family fa?

Yes, we all sing, my wife sings and I sing too and we both trained our son Shalom

Continued on page 26

celebrities who are single parents

Whether they're single moms by choice, divorce, a heartbreaking loss or relationships that just didn't work out, these famous single parents definitely define what it means to be supermoms! Celebrities including Genevieve Nnaji, Waje, Kate Henshaw and a host of other strong women are proud to be single parents to their adorable little ones. While balancing careers in the entertainment space – either as a musician, model or actor, these famous ladies are doing a great job with bringing up children on their own and making it look easy. Regardless of how they came about having their bundles of joy, this league of parents have played the role of mother and father to their child/children, especially when either is not available and it is only right to applaud their efforts. Below are Nigerian celebrities who are single parents with beautiful and strong child/children to show for their struggles over the years.

Tonto Dikeh



Sultry Nollywood actress Tonto was married to her ex-husband, Oladunni Churchill in August 2015. In February 2016, Dikeh gave birth to her son Andre Omodayo Churchill, whom she nicknamed Baby X. However in 2017, the couple parted ways and she has since assumed the role of both mother and father to her son. Tonto is obviously enjoying motherhood and she is always seen gushing over her son.

Uche Ogbodo



Pretty Nollywood actress, Uche Ogbodo in 2013 tied the knot with Apo Arthur; although the union was short-lived, it produced a beautiful daughter, Chinagorom. Uche believes her life is more fulfilling as a single mother than as a single girl without a child

Waje



Nigerian singer, Aituaeje Iruobe, known professionally as Waje is the proud mum to her daughter, Emerald Iruobe, and we must say, she's the true daughter of her mum

Genevieve Nnaji



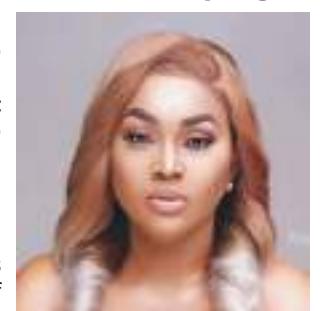
Foremost Nigerian actor, producer, and director, Genevieve Nnaji gave birth to her daughter, Chimebuka Nnaji, at the age of 17. It is also no news that her daughter is married to her U.S-based hubby, Prince Osi Chigozie Ikediwa. Her traditional marriage took place in Mbaise, Imo State.

Tiwa Savage



Famous singer and songwriter Tiwa Savage married Tunji "Tee Billz" Balogun in 2013, when the couple held their traditional marriage in Lagos and their white wedding in 2014 in Dubai. Their union produced their son, Jamil Balogun. In 2016, the duo went their separate ways in the most dramatic manner especially when Teebillz contemplated suicide.

Mercy Aigbe



Pretty fashionista, businesswoman and actress, Mercy Aigbe, who separated from her estranged husband on the basis of domestic violence is a proud mother of two beautiful kids. Before her marriage, she had her first daughter, Michelle, at 22 and she was later blessed with a son, Juwon, in Gentry's home. Since her separation, she has singlehandedly been taking care of her beautiful kids.

Continued on page 26

EVER'S WORLD

With PALANG KASMI

Living

Fostering your child's personality through nurturing guidance

By **OLUWAFEMI MAYOWA, OLUSOLA**

IN a world preoccupied with appearances, it is simple for parents to overlook the larger picture: personality development. While a healthy and stylish outward appearance is admirable, it's the unseen fabric of social skills, knowledge, and emotional intelligence that genuinely shapes a child's character. In this opinion article, I have explored a number of essential steps for parents to foster well-rounded personalities in their children, ensuring they not only appear good but also feel good and thrive in all aspects of life.

Avoid labels, embrace uniqueness: Labelling a child as "shy" or "clumsy" confines them, hindering growth. Encourage individual expression and steer clear of comparisons. Each child is a distinct mosaic of strengths and weaknesses, so let them shine in their own way.

Be an active listener, not a passive audience: Social media may dominate



playtime, but nothing beats traditional conversation. Spend quality time, listen actively, and partake in knowledge-sharing sessions. Make your child feel heard and understood, enhancing confidence and nurturing the parent-child bond.

Adapt parenting approaches: Yelling does not alter behaviour, but gentle guidance and constructive criticism do. Review your parenting style, self-reflect, and be receptive to new approaches. Resources like Learning Time can offer

valuable insights and help you keep up with evolving child development trends.

Rethink screen time: Gadgets are tempting, but excessive screen time impedes social interaction and real-world experiences. Encourage outdoor play, social games, and family outings. Teach your child to appreciate their surroundings and connect with the world beyond the screen, fostering emotional intelligence and social skills.

Rule clearly, communicate lovingly: Set clear expectations and establish healthy boundaries, but always explain the "why" behind the rules. This promotes understanding and strengthens the parent-child bond. Be empathetic, approachable, and always open to communication.

Celebrate strengths, nurture potential: Every child possesses unique talents. Instead of focusing on shortcomings, identify strengths and provide gentle guidance to help them thrive. Realistic expectations and positive reinforcement will fuel their passion and build a strong sense of self-worth.

Lead by Example: Actions speak louder than words! To show this trait, model kindness, patience, and a positive outlook on life. Your child is observing and learning

from you at every step. Be the role model you want them to emulate.

Foster independence: While nurturing is crucial, avoid stifling your child. Encourage age-appropriate independence, allowing them to complete tasks and make small decisions. This builds confidence, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment.

Be their cheerleader: Early childhood learning is a marathon, not a sprint. Your unwavering support and encouragement are your child's motivation. Let them know you believe in them, celebrate victories, and be their support during setbacks. Be their biggest cheerleader, and witness them blossom into well-rounded individuals, ready to face the world with confidence and grace.

By going beyond the surface and focusing on these crucial steps, I trust parents can assist their children in developing well-rounded personalities. This entails raising individuals who are not only confident and self-aware but also kind, empathetic, and capable of navigating life's challenges with grace and resilience. Remember, a pleasing exterior is fleeting, but a well-developed personality leaves a lasting impression and lays the foundation for a happy and fulfilling life.



THE EYE'S WORLD

With PALANG KASMI

Health

10 home remedies for foot rot

STELLA TAKYIWAA OKYERE

FOOT rot is a condition that commonly affects the feet of humans and animals, particularly livestock.

It can be caused by bacteria or fungi and is characterized by inflammation, swelling, and sometimes a foul odor.

While home remedies can help manage mild cases, it's important to consult with a healthcare professional for proper diagnosis and treatment, especially if the condition persists or worsens.

Here are some home remedies that may provide relief:

Warm soaks:

Soak the affected foot in warm water with Epsom salt for about 15-20 minutes. This can help reduce swelling and discomfort.

Apple cider vinegar (ACV) soak:

- Mix equal parts of apple cider vinegar and warm water. Soak the affected foot for 15-20 minutes. ACV has antimicrobial properties that may help fight infections.

Tea tree oil:

- Dilute tea tree oil with a carrier oil like coconut oil and apply it to the affected area. Tea tree oil has antifungal and antibacterial properties.
- **Garlic paste:**
- Crush a few garlic cloves to make a paste and apply it to the affected area. Garlic has natural antimicrobial properties.

Turmeric paste:

- Make a paste using turmeric powder and water. Apply it to the affected foot and let it sit for 20-30 minutes before rinsing. Turmeric has anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties.

Saltwater soak:

Add salt to warm water and soak the foot for 15-20 minutes. Salt can help draw out moisture and reduce bacterial or fungal growth.

Aloe vera gel:

- Apply fresh aloe vera gel to the affected foot. Aloe vera has soothing and healing properties.

Proper foot hygiene:

- Keep the affected foot clean and dry. Ensure you dry your feet



thoroughly after washing, and change socks regularly.

- **Foot powder:**
- Use antifungal foot powders to keep the feet dry and prevent the growth of fungi.

Elevate the foot:

- When resting, elevate the affected foot to reduce swelling.

Remember, these remedies are meant for mild cases, and if the condition persists or worsens, it's crucial to seek professional medical advice.

Severe cases may require prescription medications or other interventions from a healthcare provider.

STELLA TAKYIWAA OKYERE: Stella Okyere is a journalist and talented scriptwriter with a strong passion for creating a positive





Reality Bites

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Lamentations of women from Bokkos IDP camp

By PALANG KASMI

IT is over two weeks since the December Christmas eve attacks that claimed over 200 people in over 30 communities in parts of Bokkos and Mangu Local Government Areas.

Aside the loss of lives, properties, and means of livelihoods of the predominantly farming communities, the attacks has caused a huge humanitarian crisis making the once active bubbling communities and hamlet village settlements to live in Internally Displaced Persons Camps (IDP's) in terrible conditions.

This was the horrific scenario when Stefanos Foundation, led a team to visit one, out of the 13 Internally Displaced Persons IDP camps, COCIN Central, Bokkos to deliver relief Materials to victims on January 10, 2024.

The foundation is a human rights, advocacy, relief, and psycho social therapy organisation working as a voice for the persecuted Church in Nigeria. The Foundation's Program Coordinator, Engr. Mark Lipdo who led his team was received by Rev. Stephen Asugun, Chairman, Christian Association of Nigeria Bokkos, and other stakeholders where he presented food items to the IDP's.

Statistics from a coalition of affected communities indicates that in Bokkos, over 100 persons were injured and over fifteen thousand two hundred and thirty one people were displaced from 31 villages raided by suspected Fulani herders.

One after the other, the victims narrated their ordeal and stories of their gory experiences in the hands of the attackers. They called on government and stakeholders to facilitate their movement back home explaining the horrific humanitarian conditions they are faced with. Some of them disclosed that after attempting to return back home, they discovered that the attackers are still marauding in their homes, vandalising their houses. They called on security agencies to act.

We know the killers, they are our neighbours

Mrs Theresa Francis who spoke to newsmen at the COCIN Central Bokkos said the killers identity is not hidden. She said they are their Fulani neighbours, and they have their names and identities. She said the phone of some of attackers was found on the scene after the attacks and they have details to help security operatives to arrest them.

No enough food to eat

Since the incident happened, life in the IDP camp has been a challenge. "Feeding is no more as usual, and there is hardly enough food rations to go round to satisfy everybody", said Mrs Tabitha James, one of the victims. This situation has created a huge humanitarian crisis, with women and children worst hit.

She lamented the situation. Explaining further she disclosed "The food we eat is hardly enough, we line up and collect food rations on a plate. Then we go to eat our ration with our children. Imagine if you are a woman with 7 children, how can a plate or ration of food be enough for you to go and eat with them? We are not feeding adequately anymore since we got displaced from our homes as a result of the attacks", said Tabitha.

On arrival at the camp, some women were seen cooking on two big big pots, but considering the number of IDP's, the question asked was can the food go round the population of hundreds?

Tabitha disclosed that sometimes food is cooked once in the IDP camp. "Right now, we have not yet eaten, she said (It was around (11: 00 am when the team arrived and by the time they were leaving around 12: 40 pm), it was observed that the food inside the two big pots was still on fire.

We sleep on the floor

One of the IDP's, Mrs. Theresa Francis expressed sadness with their sleeping conditions after they were displaced from their homes during the Christmas eve attacks.

"We sleep on the floor, with mats, and not everyone has mattresses to sleep on. The cold harmattan weather beina



Lipdo (r) presenting the items to Bokkos CAN Chairman



Veronica Mafuyai

experienced makes it worse for us. Each night, it is a horrifying experience, the blankets are not enough to cover the cold, and we can't wait for daybreak".

"I want to use this opportunity to ask the government and other well spirited individuals to consider our plight and give us decent places of sleeping", she said.

We can't go to our farms or harvest our crops

The women at the Bokkos IDP camp further expressed their frustrations. They said they are predominantly farmers and their means of livelihood has been taken away from them, since the Christmas eve attacks.

Their spokesperson, Theresa Francis lamented that they are scared to go and harvest their Irish potatoes and other food crops which they had planted.

"We cannot go back to our farms to harvest the potatoes we planted, those that attempted were attacked or chased back. The attackers are still there marauding and moving unabated. Those that attempted were chased back"

she said raising concerns that the with the security operatives on ground, the attackers are busy removing and vandalising their zincs, doors and other valuables. She also alleged that their communities are still not safe to return to, as the attackers are visibly seen

welding arms and threatening the people who are daring to return.

Our children are out of school

The IDP's lamented that while other children in nursery, primary and secondary schools have resumed after the yuletide celebrations, their children are out of school, seen roaming in the IDP shelters.

"No one has said anything concerning our children's resumption, we do not know what to do", said Theresa.

I can't pay my son's hospital bills

Another IDP, Mrs. Sarah John, from Luei, one of the communities attacked said parts of her frustration after her house was burnt is that her son, Benjamin fell

sick has been operated upon at Zion hospital, Bokkos, but no funds to pay the bills.

"I am frustrated, I cannot go to harvest my crops, I do not have a means of livelihood, and no financial means to pay my son's hospital bill. He was operated upon. I cannot go to farm, I don't have a trade, it's not safe, we don't have a shelter, our house was burnt".

It was a similar ordeal for Veronica Mafuyai, a widow with 4 kids, including twins who said she suffers psychological trauma after witnessing how her husband was killed, and how his corpse was recovered days after he was declared missing.

She said her 4 months-old twins are sick and hospitalised, and she battles with the hospital bills payments.

Another woman from Beres, one of the attacked villages was said to give birth after the attacks, including two other women. Pregnant and lactating mother's were also affected, with many living in the IDP shelters.

Yohanna Mackwim, a retired security operative described the horrifying nature of the attack. He said they were attacked on Christmas eve as they were preparing for the celebrations.

While calling on government to act, He wondered why security agencies are yet to apprehend the killers who he said are seen still moving freely and welding guns within the attacked communities.

Stakeholders call for intervention

CAN Chairman, Bokkos Local Government Area, Rev. Stephen Asugun while welcoming the team disclosed that there are 13 Camps in the LGA, with more than 200 persons killed after the Christmas eve attacks.

"Bokkos people are really in grief, we don't know what to do. On the 23rd and 24th, there was an attack by the Fulani's on us and many of our villages. We lost about 200 of our members that were preparing to celebrate Christmas and most them lost everything with most of their things burnt to ashes. None of them came out with anything from their houses".

He urged for continued interventions like that of Stefanos Foundation to bring some relief to the internally displaced persons.

Speaking earlier, Engr Mark Lipdo Program Coordinator Stefanos Foundation who led his team for the relief intervention condemned the attacks on Christians stating his organisation had issued early warning signals of the impending attacks, and have kept records of all the casualties of the attacks occurring in the state since 2001.

He appreciated international donors, the Partners Church in chains in Ireland, for sponsoring the relief aid. Lipdo also called for more relief aid for the victims to cushion the effects of the humanitarian crisis they are facing and asked the international community to come to the aid of Plateau State.

"A situation where armless and helpless are living and sleeping in their calm homes in the night and are being attacked with sophisticated firearms is unacceptable and a situation that calls for international attention," Lipdo said.

Describing the attacks as unacceptable and a pure act of terrorism targeted at Christians, Lipdo tasked security agencies and government up their game and salvage the situation which could have been averted if the early warning signals was taken seriously.

"It is non acceptable and a situation that calls for international attention. It is no longer news that what has happened here can be best described as terrorist activity, which is also happening in some other parts of Nigeria. We are calling on the Government with a loud voice to look at what is happening in Bokkos today and many other parts of the middle belt and North Eastern parts of Nigeria," Lipdo said.

Prayers was offered for Gods divine intervention, for arrest of the perpetrators of the evil acts, peace, and display of political will so that victims will return to their ancestral homes.

EYE'S WORLD

With PALANG KASMI

Relationships

Ways women control their men without uttering a word

IT'S not uncommon for partners to influence one another. However, when influence turns into control, it can have profound effects on the relationship.

For healthy relationships, communication is key. If you find your thoughts and actions consistently directed or limited by your girlfriend, it might be a sign of control.

Also, consider the emotional atmosphere of your relationship. Is there room for open dialogue, or does your partner's influence lead to a sense of restriction? Control can manifest in subtle ways, like dictating how time is spent, who you interact with, or even what you wear.

Let's discuss subtle signs that may indicate that your girlfriend is crossing the line from partnership to control.

Emotional manipulation

Through facial expressions and body language, your woman may manipulate how you feel, subtly guiding your decisions and actions. For instance, imagine your girlfriend consistently sighing when you spend time with friends. This non-verbal cue might make you feel guilty, manipulating



you to stay home instead of being with your friends.

Silent expectations

When women have unspoken expectations, they create a set of anticipated behaviours. This can strongly influence men without directly

talking about it. For instance, if your partner expects you to handle all household chores without saying so, you might end up doing them without a clear conversation about who does what.

Withholding affection

Not showing love or attention can be a strong way to control. When women deliberately hold back love or intimacy, they might guide the direction of a relationship. For example, imagine your partner stops being affectionate and gives

you the cold shoulder when she wants to get something from you. This subtle manipulation relies on the desire for affection, making you more likely to do anything she wants to regain that closeness.

Silent treatment

When your partner purposely stays silent after an argument, it can leave you feeling confused, anxious and worried. This purposeful silence creates a scenario where the unspoken dictates the direction of the relationship.

Conditional approval

When approval depends on some actions, your woman can influence the decisions you make, creating a feeling of control. For example, if your partner only shows happiness when you follow her specific instructions, she is using conditional approval to guide your behaviour, subtly steering the relationship in the direction she desires.

If any of the above-mentioned signs resonate, it might be time to have an open and honest conversation about boundaries and what you expect from each other.

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BUSINESS WORLD

Nigeria's gas sector and the role of tax

THIS transition is part of a larger plan to expand the economy and decrease reliance on crude oil exports. With a rising population and increasing energy demands, the sector presents a pathway for sustainable economic growth, catering to the changing needs of the nation.

At the Nigerian Association for Energy Economics 16th Annual International Conference, with the theme, 'Energy evolution, transition, and reform: Prospects for African Economies', the Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission disclosed that Nigeria currently accounts for 33 per cent of the total gas reserves in Africa, estimated at 209 trillion cubic feet.

This vast resource encompasses natural gas, liquefied natural gas, compressed natural gas, and liquefied petroleum gas, presenting diverse applications in power generation, industrial use, residential and commercial consumption. The adoption of natural gas as a cleaner energy alternative to traditional fossil fuels has also gained traction in promoting environmental sustainability and reducing the nation's carbon footprint which is the way to go considering the potential challenges associated with global warming.

Strategic tax incentives in the gas sector are vital for economic growth, attracting local and foreign investments. Focused on reducing crude oil reliance, government initiatives such as the Nigerian Gas Master Plan and the National Gas Policy foster an environment conducive to investment, promoting sustainable growth, and enhancing the country's energy infrastructure.

In line with its commitment to bolster the gas sector, the Nigerian government introduced a series of tax incentives tailored to attract both local and foreign investors. These incentives have fostered a business-friendly environment, encouraged innovation, and stimulated investment across the gas value chain. Notably, the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) and recent amendments to the Company Income Tax Act by the Finance Act have laid the foundation for a

The rising demand globally for cleaner energy resources is a platform for Nigeria to harness its gas resources for the development of the nation's economy. Nigeria's gas sector has become a key player in the country's economic progress, offering exciting opportunities for both local and international investors. OLUWATUMININU FAMILUSI writes.



more favourable fiscal regime for companies operating within the gas sector.

Eligible companies engaged in gas utilisation are entitled to a tax-free period for up to five years, accelerated capital allowance after the tax-free period, and tax-free dividends during the tax-free period. To encourage investment in domestic gas operations and large-scale gas utilisation industries, the PIA extends the gas utilisation incentives to cover these industries. Further, it grants an additional tax-free period of five years for investors in gas pipelines.

Also geared toward promoting investment in the sector through tax incentives is the fiscal framework of the gas sector as also introduced in the PIA. These incentives include the exemption

of hydrocarbon tax, reduced a direct path to financial gains for royalties payable to the investors, fostering an environment conducive to specifically gas produced for substantial investments in the domestic use and the exclusion of LPG sector with potential price-based royalties for gas mechanisms for strategic alignment.

There is also the exemption of value added tax (VAT) on the importation of increased investment and equipment and machinery for all expansion translating into gas-related activities. This significant tax savings for exemption plays a crucial role in businesses and fostering a more vibrant and competitive landscape for investors, enhancing operational efficiency and overall profitability.

Simultaneously, fostering public-private partnerships serves as an integral enhancement to a collaborative framework. Actively encouraging collaboration

between public and private entities facilitates the optimal utilisation of private sector expertise and resources, particularly in critical areas such as infrastructure development. The government's recent approval of import duty and VAT exemptions on LPG aims to align energy and fiscal policies, utilising private sector demand. These incentives create

their resources into cutting-edge gas-fired power plants, thereby diversifying the energy mix and laying the foundation for sustainable economic growth.

As the demand for cleaner fuels grows, Nigeria's CNG and LPG industries gain momentum. The PIA promotes investment, offering affordable, eco-friendly alternatives. This sets the stage for a thriving market, providing opportunities for investors to tap into the rising demand for sustainable energy solutions.

Despite tax incentives and investment opportunities in the gas sector, companies must prioritise tax compliance. The Nigerian government enforces stringent measures to ensure obligations are met, fostering socio-economic development. Strict compliance demonstrates commitment to ethics, promoting transparency and accountability in the gas sector for overall industry enhancement.

Navigating the global energy market complexities, Nigeria relies on abundant gas reserves to assert itself globally. Aiming to reduce crude oil dependence and broaden energy horizons, the gas sector, buoyed by tax incentives, offers hope and opportunity. The success of these incentives hinges on meticulous design, implementation, and monitoring for optimal utility and effectiveness.

Oluwatumininu Familusi, Associate Director, Business Tax Services, Ernst & Young Nigeria.

"Eligible companies engaged in gas utilisation are entitled to a tax-free period for up to five years, accelerated capital allowance after the tax-free period, and tax-free dividends during the tax-free period. To encourage investment in domestic gas operations and large-scale gas utilisation industries, the PIA extends the gas utilisation incentives to cover these industries. Further, it grants an additional tax-free period of five years for investors in gas pipelines. Also geared toward promoting investment in the sector through tax incentives is the fiscal framework of the gas sector as also introduced in the PIA. These incentives include the exemption of hydrocarbon tax, reduced royalties payable to the government on gas exploration, specifically gas produced for domestic use and the exclusion of price-based royalties for gas production."

BUSINESS WORLD

How we settled for N800 to dollar - FG

PRESIDENT Bola Tinubu (middle) signing the 2023 supplementary Budget at the Presidential Villa in Abuja on Wednesday. With him are: From left: Senate Leader, Sen Opeyemi Bamidele; Chairman Senate Committee on Finance, Sen Olamilakan Adeola; President of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio; Speaker, House of Representatives, Tajudeen Abbas; Chairman, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, George Akume; Minister of Budget, Atiku Bagudu and Chairman, Federal Inland Revenue Services Zachs Adedeji



Tinubu

RESIDENT Bola Tinubu (middle) signing the 2023 supplementary Budget at the Presidential Villa in Abuja on Wednesday. With him are: From left: Senate Leader, Sen Opeyemi Bamidele; Chairman Senate Committee on Finance, Sen Olamilakan Adeola; President of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio; Speaker, House of Representatives, Tajudeen Abbas; Chairman, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, George Akume; Minister of Budget, Atiku Bagudu and Chairman, Federal Inland Revenue Services Zachs Adedeji

N750 to the dollar in the 2024 budget, which the National Assembly raised to N800 to the dollar, the government considered and viewed critically, the average performance of the naira.

"For budgeting purposes, you don't use spot rate of anything. Oil price can go to 120 today, maybe there is a shortage; maybe there is a collision between two ships that will block a channel. It would be foolish to use that as a reference price. I should take a period of maybe six months to one year and say let me observe this average behaviour, so you don't use spot prices," the minister noted.

He explained that, "much as we are hoping that it would soon come below, but at the time you are doing the budget you will take a view on average performance. And that's what we took."

"In fact we took an average performance of 750 on the executive side and we proposed it to the National

Assembly and the National Assembly in its wisdom, and mind you this is democracy, and President Tinubu is one who is a lifelong advocate of institutional separation of power," Bagudu added.

The minister also said that President Tinubu respected the National Assembly in allowing them to further raise the exchange rate, considering his high respect for institutions and democracy.

"So, he respected democracy that even though it was higher than what he submitted, but the institution that says so, has the authority to say so and even at the time they say 100, because it's not an official rate, it's tidal, because with the deregulated market, you no longer have an official rate, it is much lower than even the way the markets are bidding," the minister said.

The minister noted that the federal government was sure that with the measures it is currently taking, there would soon be significant increase in the supply of foreign exchange into the economy.

Funding for Nigerian startups hit three-year low

THE amount of funding that Nigerian startups raised declined to the lowest in at least three years in 2023, a new report by a research firm, Africa: The Big Deal, has shown.

The funding reduced to \$410 million from \$1.2 billion in 2022. The amount caused Africa's biggest economy to lose its spot as the top on the continent to Kenya.

"Nigeria is the country where the most dramatic change happened in 2023. While the country still claimed the highest number of start-ups to raise \$100k or more (146, 29 percent of the continent), the amount they raised was divided by three year-on-year (-67 percent) to reach \$410million, compared to \$1.2billion in 2022, and \$1.7billion in 2021," the report said.

It said as a result, its share of Western African funding continued to drop to reach 68 percent, down from 85 percent in 2021, and 77 percent in 2022.

"This is the lowest regional share of any Big Four market since we started collecting the data in 2019. Of course, even though it represents only 13 percent of the funding, there is a wealth of activity beyond

the Big Four."

Apart from Africa: The Big Deal report, foreign investments into Africa's most populous nation dropped to \$654.7 million in the third quarter, the lowest level since the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) started collating the data in 2013.

The total foreign investments into the country declined for the second straight quarter by 36.5 percent to \$654.7 million in Q3 from \$1.03 billion in the previous quarter.

It also declined on a year-on-year basis by 43.6 percent from \$1.16 billion in Q3 2022.

The report also revealed that with just under \$800 million

raised in 2023, Kenya attracted the most funding, 28 percent of the continent's total.

"While it suffered a decline (-25 percent year-on-year), its share of Eastern Africa's funding grew from 86 percent in 2022 to 91 percent in 2023," it said.

It added that in Egypt, 48 such ventures raised \$100k+ in 2023, the lowest number out of the Big Four. But thanks to a year-on-year decline (-20 percent) more moderate than Kenya and most importantly Nigeria, it was enough for the country to claim the second spot.

"Egypt's share of North

NNPC Ltd defies gravity, records N2.55trn profit

THE Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) has reported a profit of N2.548 trillion in 2022, the highest since its inception in 1977.

They showed a significant improvement of 277.8 percent increase over the N674.1 billion profits recorded in the 2021 financial year.

The Company in its 2022 Financial Performance Report posted online said it defied gravity in its operations to bounce back from the losses of

N803 billion and N1.7 billion recorded in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

According to the report, 2020 recorded N287 billion profit which it tagged "Turning Point" while in 2021, the company's profit continued to grow to N674.1 billion tagged "Assurance".

The report stated that the profit which continued to rise up to N2.548 trillion in 2022.

Recall that the NNPC Ltd had between December 30, 2023 and January 5, 2024 recorded

HE Federal Government on Thursday said it would investigate how the non-functioning Ajaokuta Steel Company Limited accrued N33bn in electricity debt which prompted the Transmission Company of Nigeria to disconnect the company from the national grid.

The Minister of Steel Development, Shuaibu Audu, revealed this to State House correspondents after meeting President Bola Tinubu at the Aso Rock Villa, Abuja, recently.

On Wednesday, the TCN disconnected ASCL from the national grid as the moribund company failed to clear a debt of N33bn owed to the NBET and service providers.

The N33bn comprises N30.85bn for energy and capacity delivered by NBET and N2.22bn owed to service providers. Addressing correspondents, Audu minister vowed to consider the matter.

He marveled at how the company accumulated such debt in electricity consumption when it had not been in operating in full capacity.

"I mean these are some of the things that need to be clearly looked into. One of the things I spoke to the MD of Ajaokuta today, and this was one of the questions I asked and we're going to get to the bottom of it: why consumption of so much electricity in a place that is not operating at full

Nigeria, others face food insecurity

THE World Bank has warned that an increase in conflict in the Middle East could potentially worsen the food insecurity in Nigeria and other countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

The bank noted this in its Global Economic Prospect report where it projected an outlook for the world's economy in 2024.

FG to probe Ajaokuta over N33bn electricity debt



Shuaibu

capacity.

"Part of what we also need to do is that we're trying to revive Ajaokuta in a collegiate system, in piecemeal, and so we may not have the capacity to be able to pay all those outstanding amounts immediately.

"Part of what the MD of Ajaokuta told me is that most of them money is in interest payments. And NBET, the electricity company that has disconnected it is also a government agency," Audu

explained. Shuaibu also said the FG would not allow its agency, NBET, to hinder the effort to revive the steel company, which has been out of operation for about 45 years.

He said, "So, if we as a government ministry, government agency are trying to revive Ajaokuta working hard to do that, we should not have another hand within the same government making things very difficult for us."

According to the bank, political instability and violence together with disruptions in global trade especially in the Middle East portends huge risk for the region with regards to food insecurity.

The report noted that an oil price increase as a result of conflict would lead to increased transport and logistics costs which could disrupt supply chains and worsen the already high food inflation witnessed in Nigeria and other countries in the region.

"A conflict-induced sustained oil price spike would not only raise food prices by increasing production and transportation costs but could also disrupt supply chains, leading to less affordable food and an uptick in malnutrition rates in the region."

The bank also warned that the Sub-Saharan Africa region remains susceptible to extreme weather events like floods, droughts etc linked to climate change could lead to an increase in food inflation as the majority of the region's farmers practice subsistence agriculture.

In October, the Food and

Agricultural Organisation (FAO) warned that around 26.5 million Nigerians are at risk of hunger in 2024. Already, food inflation has blown over the roof in Nigeria. According to the NBS, Nigeria's food inflation for November stood at 32.84 percent.

According to the United Nations (UN), around 78 percent of Africans cannot afford a healthy diet since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic in a report titled Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition. It noted that Africa is not on track to achieve its food security targets of 2030.

The Israeli/Palestine conflict in Gaza has the potential of destabilising the Middle East and derailing global supply chains. In December, Houthi rebels in Yemen began attacking ships with Israeli ownership or destined for Israeli ports. The attacks could potentially affect up to 10 percent of global trade and increase freight time, cost and insurance which does not augur well from a consumer standpoint.



Kyari

157 incidents of crude oil theft

from seven incident sources and arrested 17 suspects.

The sources included the Nigeria Agip Oil Company, Pipeline Infrastructure Nigeria Ltd, Maton Engineering Ltd, Tantita Security Service Ltd, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), NNPC Command and Control centre and Government Security Agencies.

Its report stated that in the past week, 52 illegal refineries were discovered and destroyed in Abia, Imo, Rivers

and Bayelsa states while 32 illegal connections were uncovered in several parts of the Niger Delta.

They were removed and repaired along the central corridor in the Niger Delta while seven illegal storage sites were uncovered in Akwa-Ibom state and buried crude drums unearthed in bushes in Bayelsa and Warri, Delta.

The company said there was no backing down on the menace until it was eradicated.

ENTREPRENEUR WATCH

WITH CELESTINE D. ATTSAR

Key insights on how to spot important trends

Trends exist whether you see them or not and one of the best ways to look at the importance of trends is related to something Steve Jobs once said, "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." The interpretation could be to examine past trends, add in variables of people and markets and future trends, and you just might be able to create an innovative product or service. As current or future entrepreneurs, you really need to look for and track trends as you might be raising money, hiring people and building a company that has the potential to rise along with the trends, writes BERNHARD SCHROEDER.



THE key is to understand that there are multiple trends happening at the same time. Some are macro trends which might span entire industries, marketplaces or even people. Some are micro trends. An example would be electric vehicles. A micro trend inside that industry could be the rise of autonomous software. The pet care industry sells more dogs to a Millennial marketplace waiting to have children and here comes organic dog food and pet insurance. And so on. The good news is that you can learn how to spot trends and create your own 'set of dots' that give you insights into rising macro trends and possible micro opportunities to create next generation startups.

Here are several insights to help you better spot and analyze trends.

Understand the difference between trends and fads. Trends have long deep legs and can last a long time. Think smartphones and laptop computers, perhaps even farm to table food. Fads appear for short periods of time and then disappear. They may actually reappear several years later for another generation. Think tie dye t-shirts and bell bottom jeans. Don't confuse the two. It's very hard to build a company on a fad.

Macro trends can be global.

If you see macro trends in computing, healthcare, climate, food or even entertainment in the United States, chances are those macro trends exist all around the world in varying degrees. What's interesting for entrepreneurs, is that it might actually be easier to create the startup company in a place where the trend is moving early and fast with little competition. So, pay attention to where trends surface and if that region just might provide a competitive advantage.

For every macro trend, there are multiple micro trends. While the pandemic was not really a trend, it did create a huge work from home macro trend which fueled several micro trends like buying more web cameras for Zoom meetings and chairs for home offices. It also accelerated the food delivery trend. Believe it or not, masks were actually a fad as they have now greatly receded. If you invested and built a mask factory in 2020, you probably made some great short-term revenue but that factory sits idle today.

Follow real leaders and not influencers. This one will be a challenge for Millennials and Gen Z who seems to get their 'news and insights' from social media and influencers. The problem with that is that the information is only new for a

brief period of time in the now and does not really look forward into the future. Plus most influencers are not experts. You have to cultivate better information sources and start to create a 'leaders' list of people you follow (not as influencers but as experts) as they are building forward leaning companies or have always known when to pivot their company to be successful. And when you do create your leaders list, read everything about them, read all their interviews, any books about them, listen to them in earnings reports, set up Google Alerts on them and their

companies, even their competition.

Everyone has an opinion, so follow the data. They say it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in anything. One thing you can do is to surround yourself with experts in an industry you care about. Care about dogs? Then cultivate company leaders from pet food, pet care, pet healthcare, pet kennels and even a veterinarian or two. Know what's happening in the industry from several sources to give you insights on what comes next. Second, no matter what anyone says, follow the data. If someone says

something, don't believe it; verify it yourself. The cool thing about data is that it does not lie. It just is.

entrepreneurs who get too close to their product or service like to believe they are the customer. That is, they think they know exactly what the customer wants. Know this, you are not the customer and the while the customer may not always be right, they are never wrong. Never wrong as in not buying your product or service if they are not convinced of the benefits. So, spend time in customer forums online, listen to social media chat and complaints, read reviews, and if you can, visit customer environments and observe them as they purchase or trial products. You can never have too much personal customer insight.

Read a lot of trend reports. The Internet is a beautiful thing. Search for 'Gen Z' and you might get industry or trend reports from McKinsey, Deloitte, E & Y, Statista, and so on. Why would you want to create your own data or shout out your opinion when these powerful reports contain so much good data, trend insights and future projections? These types of reports are your friend. They don't always have the exact answer you are looking for but they substantiate or eliminate the noise you might be hearing. And by linking several sources of reputable information, you might be connecting your own dots to give you valuable insights which could lead to an amazing startup.

Follow me on [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).

"They say it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in anything. One thing you can do is to surround yourself with experts in an industry you care about. Care about dogs? Then cultivate company leaders from pet food, pet care, pet healthcare, pet kennels and even a veterinarian or two. Know what's happening in the industry from several sources to give you insights on what comes next. Second, no matter what anyone says, follow the data. If someone says something, don't believe it; verify it yourself. The cool thing about data is that it does not lie. It just is. entrepreneurs who get too close to their product or service like to believe they are the customer. That is, they think they know exactly what the customer wants. Know this, you are not the customer and the while the customer may not always be right, they are never wrong. Never wrong as in not buying your product or service if they are not convinced of the benefits. So, spend time in customer forums online, listen to social media chat and complaints, read reviews, and if you can, visit customer environments and observe them as they purchase or trial products. You can never have too much personal customer insight."



God has been faithful

- Ernest Dades

Continued from page 18

who does it even better than us. We are trusting God that this new born will follow suit

Where do you see yourself in the next coming years?

In the next coming years, I see myself on the streets, in the ghettos in and out of Nigeria with my band ministering to the people physically, I see myself mentoring more people. Yes, I was in Aso Rock in December 2021 on the 13th, where I feel was one of the biggest platforms in Nigeria. Standing before the powers that be in Nigeria was a lifetime experience so I see myself fulfilling more of such opportunities as the Lord desires from me.

Are we expecting another new masterpiece?

Lots of work to be recorded and released. I just released Marmarin Sujada on the 14th of November 2021 and it was a huge success. His Excellency Rt. Hon. Simon Bako Lalong

was there live with his encouragement and that was a great



honour to me.

Your advice to upcoming Gospel musicians?

For the upcoming musicians, I sincerely advice that you humble yourselves to mentorship. As gospel musicians, you must tarry in God's presence all the time to be able to receive messages for the people from God. Make sure you learn

how to play musical instruments so as to enhance your gift.

Achieving excellence is not negotiable and above all
**F E A R
 GOD**



celebrities who are single parents

Continued from page 18

Lilian Esoro



Elegant Nollywood actress and CEO, Goldie Locks Hair Salon, Lilian Esoro in November 2015, married Ubi Franklin. According to reports, Lilian was previously married with two kids before she tied the knot with Ubi.

Kate Henshaw



Nollywood actress and fitness enthusiast, Kate Henshaw was in 2000 married to Roderick Nuttal and they have a daughter, Gabrielle Nutall together.

Anna Ebieri



24-year-old Anna Ebieri is an ex-beauty queen who was crowned the 2012 Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria. She has a daughter with music act, Flavour Nabania. Anna said she has never regretted keeping her baby as she is her greatest achievement in life so far and she falls in love with her every second of the day.

Yvonne Jegede



Yvonne Jegede in 2017 married her hubby Olakunle Fawole, aka Abounce, who is also an actor and the third and last child of the late broadcaster and actress, Bukky Ajayi. Her marriage which lasted a year produced a baby boy named Xavier.

Biodun Okeowo



Popular Yoruba movie actress, Biodun Okeowo a.k.a Omobutty according to reports openly admitted that she was never married at any point although she was once in an abusive relationship which left her a single parent. She is a proud mum of two lovely children.

Tayo Odueke



Tayo Odueke, aka Sikiratu Sindodo Yoruba movie actress, Tayo Odueke popularly known as Sikiratu Sindodo is the proud mum to her daughter Naomi Suleiman whom she gave birth to at 21.

Liz Da Silva



Yoruba actress Liz Da Silva is the proud mum to her 6-year-old son. One she always flaunts with so much joy and pride.

Adunni Ade



Gorgeous Nollywood actress, Adunni Ade has two sons; D'Marion and Ayden. She revealed that after she made a difficult choice to break up with their father, she would continue being a single parent. It is a known fact that Adunni doesn't joke with her boys as she adores them so much.

Iyabo Ojo



Popular Nollywood actor, businesswoman and fashionista, Iyabo Ojo was once married to a Lagos-based movie marketer in 1999 when she was 21; a union that produced her two adorable children - Felix Ojo and Priscilla Ajoke Ojo. She has since divorced her ex-husband and has moved on with working hard to build her career and business venture which she named after her children,

FesPris.

SUNDAY FEATURE

For citizens, government's economic patriotism in 2024

"I have always thought the actions of men are best interpreters of their thoughts" – John Locke. The above quote resonates with the likes of the late Prof Bade Onimode, Prof. Claude Ake, Prof. Eskor Toyo, Prof Sam Aluko and Henry Boyo Nigeria's finest monetary expert. These great men of ideas and praxism of economics never failed to admonish the Nigerian state on how best to address the problems in our economy, writes ADEFOLARIN A. OLAMILEKAN.

THEY did their best to speak to power in a manner of economic patriotism. However, it seems things are getting worse even after these men have exited the stage. The current economic woes have taken heavy toll on the living standards of Nigerians. What is out there in the streets and corners across states is largely pensive.

Worries, complaints, despair, depression and melancholy are boldly written on the faces of young and old, men and women, boys and girls. The slogan "let the poor breath" has become a recitation to mock Nigerians; even as the nation exudes an ominous sign of desperation and frustration from citizens for their seeming anguish.

All this is happening because of the reality from the macroeconomic indices, particularly, the headline inflation at 28% and food inflation at over 33%, among others. These indices by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reflect the negative economic consequences of the times we live in this part of the world.

It's crystal clear that Nigeria's economy over the last two decades has not been favourable to the citizens. The negative Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has refused to grow beyond \$450 billion for a country of over 200 million people.

Although, government would always claim the economy is resilient, but this is not translating into better deals for the people. The economic growth has no capacity, but a mere jobless growth (unemployment 55% and poverty 40.1%).

We live with the evidence of businesses shutting down, deepening unemployment pool and the naira depreciating to its lowest in history against the US dollar and other foreign currencies.

This is witnessed in a country that is blessed with abundant human and material resources. It beats the imagination to ask why citizens of this nation battle with this grave economic challenges. One may be tempted to conclude that the people are cursed.

It is a clarion call to genuinely seek courage and optimism in the current dilemma. This is our home and there is no other place to run to; some of us have decided to stay not minding our japa citizens.

For us, we believe that with the right attitude, efforts, determination and quality policies, that define and place integrity on the table, Nigeria will rise from despondency and gloom, of which this piece "citizens and government's



economic patriotism" speaks to.

A recount of the modest history of our nation cannot be overemphasised when it comes to discussing our economic trajectory. In the 1970s to late 1990s the nation lost out in implementing people centred economic policies. This period marked the breeding of top echelon of military elite class that enjoyed political power and economic windfall from crude oil.

The period brought onboard individuals that served alongside the military junta as contractors. Others enjoyed the luxury appointment as ministers, deputies to military governors and local government executives. Many of them were prepared to succeed the military through formation of political parties.

The military regimes spent billions of naira, largely, on infrastructure developments. Their time also marked the era of abandoned white elephant projects across the nation. Their participation in looting the national treasury remains ever green on our memory.

Nevertheless, the military ended their grip on political power in May 29, 1999, with the

return to democratic rule, ushering Nigeria into the anticipated eldorado of economic prosperity and unlimited development of human and material resources.

Alas, the entire citizenry have lived in disappointment ever since. Reason being that both citizens and government failed to capitalise on the tenets and principles of democracy. Consequently, we suffer a combination of post-election tension, economic flip flops, insecurity and humanitarian crisis that threatened the foundation of our dear nation.

Fortunately, the 2000s saw Nigeria tagged as sub-Sahara Africa's fastest growing economy, but we ourselves knew it was a mere gimmick of media paparazzi to woo FDIs and FPIs, for the leaders to borrow money from World Bank, IMF and others.

Regrettably, today we have become a case study in failed national economic development efforts. Poor governance and development are making economic analysts and professional forecasters' work easy. For instance, a recent attempt by Nigeria to re-launch a

national airline as our flag carrier ended up as a national embarrassment and fraud.

Another case of reference is the dilemma around the four national refineries, with billions expended in the so called Turn Around Maintenance (TAM) without results. The nation relies on imported petroleum products, which breeds fuel subsidy corruption, government's lack of transparency and accountability in the oil and gas industry.

It should be said that the foregoing attempt on the modest history of our dear nation since the return to civilian administration is to dissect the contemporary Nigeria's economic perspective. It reminds us that we have been missing the golden opportunity to attend a place of bliss.

However, all hope is not lost. Our intention is to draw attention to important lessons from the period under review. This is a clarion call for everyone to rise up as a people resolved and determined to rise above temporary setbacks. We should set our nation back on the path of economic growth, development and inclusive political progress

anchored on people-centred democracy.

Given our famed energetic disposition and drive as a people, the challenges are definitely not beyond Nigerians, young and old, to set our economy back on the path of growth and inclusive development – a task for the government and citizens alike. However, for us, government and citizens are different sides of a coin that can make this patriotism happen.

But first, the government being the defining feature of the state shoulders a great responsibility for the growth and development of Nigeria, as well as guaranteeing security and socio-economic wellbeing of its citizens. This is well established in the 1999 federal constitution as amended.

I conclude this piece with the admonition of Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States of America: "Great thoughts speak only to the thoughtful mind, but great actions speak to all mankind".

Olamilekan, a political economist, writes via adefolarin77@gmail.com 08107407870, 08073814436 Share this:

NEWS

Mutfwang condoles PDP stalwart over mother's demise

By PETER TITLE

THE Executive Governor of Plateau State, Barrister Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang, has extended his heartfelt condolences to Mr. Kefas Ropshik, a People's Democratic Party, PDP stalwart, over the demise of his mother, Mama Rhoda Danladi.

According to a statement signed and made available to **SUNDAY STANDARD** by the Director of Press and Public Affairs (DOPPA), she peacefully departed after an illness at the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH).

Governor Mutfwang in the release, expressed deep sorrow over the sad incident, acknowledging Mama's significant impact not only within the Ropshik family but also in the entire state and nation.

He noted the role played by the late Mama Rhoda in instilling discipline and resourcefulness in her children and fostering community peace.

The governor stated that



Mutfwang

Mama's legacy, characterized by a life well-lived, will be fondly remembered by those fortunate to have known her. Governor Mutfwang, on behalf of himself, family, the government, and the people of Plateau State, extended sincere sympathy to Mr. Kefas Ropshik and the entire family as they mourn the demise of their matriarch.

From WILLIE ATTAH, Gombe

Gombe nets N13b IGR in 2023

THE Gombe State Internal Revenue Service, says it was able to generate the sum of N13b as internally generated revenue in 2023 despite challenges of economic crisis in the country.

The Service' head, Corporate Communications, Mr Farouk Muazu Gombe, in a statement made available to our correspondent, expressed confidence that year 2024 will be super progressive and productive with the unwavering compliance of its taxpayers.

He said, the Service looks forward to a seamless relationship with its taxpayers and well wishers on revenue drive, generation and growth to advance the goodwill cause of the State Governor, Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya.

According to Mr Farouk, the Service remains appreciative of its esteemed taxpayers for their compliance towards meeting their civic obligations and working with the Service to support the State Government in moving the state to greater heights.

He said, "Your contributions to taxation has made it possible for commendable results recorded in the year 2023 of

beautiful entry into the year 2024.

"The management of Gombe State Internal Revenue Service, on behalf of the entire staff wishes to extend warm greetings and welcome the general public to the new year 2024", Mr Farouk stated.

While extending the Service' warm greetings for the season, it wished the general public a



Yahaya

NIWA MD solicits for team work

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

AS part of efforts to reposition the National Inland Waterways Authority towards promoting and achieving its aims and objectives of the marine and blue economy in the country, the Managing Director, Bola Oyebanji, has solicited for teamwork among members of the staff to boost productivity on its service delivery.

Oyebanji affirmed that with teamwork, the core mandate of the authority in Marine and Blue economy is achievable.

Oyebanji made the call while speaking at the National Inland Waterways Authority NIWA Special Retreat with the

theme "Repositioning National Inland Waterways Authority for Excellence", held in Lokoja, the Kogi State capital recently.

He explained that every staff member should consider himself /herself as viable in the struggle to reposition NIWA for maximum performance that would in turn add value to the system. His words, "We have all been positioned to add value to the system in diverse ways. While some are to design policy directions, others have been picked to be the drivers of such policies. I likened the two groups to the main teams piloting a ship on a journey.

"While some hold the deck, others ensure the engines below run at their utmost performance. The ultimate goal is to achieve excellence at sea.

"Therefore, our assignment at this retreat is to discuss and have a working template upon which the aspirations of Mr President on Inland Waterways, through the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, will be achieved.

"As I said about three months ago in my inaugural address to the management and staff of the Authority, the objectives of NIWA are achievable, and with our collective determination, they will be achieved.

"However, all of us must be willing to play our roles as expected. So, I charge all the General Managers, Deputy General Managers, the Area Managers, to brave up for the work ahead. As the Honourable Minister of Marine and Blue Economy and the Permanent Secretary have signed a performance bond with Mr President, I have equally signed my performance bond with the Honourable Minister and the Permanent Secretary same way. All of you must sign a performance bond with me as a promise to deliver on your mandates.

"It is important for you to do this with every sense of responsibility as it will determine our working relationship going forward.

"Ladies and gentlemen, for the next 48 hours, I appeal to

you to

open your minds and apply yourselves to the processes and the different tasks that will be assigned to you. In this retreat, nothing should be held back. Every participant in this retreat has been carefully selected in light of the assignment at hand. Accordingly, every opinion is important.

"Your contributions at this retreat are part of what we require to have a successful journey as an organisation", NIWA Boss

posited. The Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, Mrs. Magdalene Ajani, admonished the participants to avail themselves of the opportunity to grab some of the things they did not know before now.

Ajani reiterated the commitment of the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy towards achieving the goals and objectives through the Performance Management System. He added that all the staff must have at least 25 percent to the Minister, 25 percent to NIWA and 50 percent to the Head of Service of the Federation.

She admonished civil servants not to misdirect the Managing Director in discharge of his duties.

The Permanent Secretary also warned the staff to be wary of any nefarious activities that can set trap for either the Minister of the Marine and Blue Economy and the Managing Director of National Inland Waterways

students receive ASUU scholarships

From MUSLIUDEEN ADEBAYO, Ibadan

2023 indigent students scholarship award by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), University of Ibadan chapter.

The six students were presented with scholarships recently.

Our correspondent gathered that the union has been giving yearly scholarships to brilliant but indigent students to ensure that they are supported to finish their education and contribute to national and international development.

Some of those who received the scholarship included a 200 level student of the Department of Medicine and Surgery, Ilori Ayomide, Busari Temitayo from Department of Microbiology and a 400 level student of Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries Management, Osiga Ibrahim.

Others are Folorunsho Anuoluwa from Department of Medicine and Surgery, Ekop Uko from Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Adesina Adebare, Department of Archeology and Anthropology. ASUU Chairman, University of Ibadan chapter, Professor Ayo Akinwale, while speaking, said that the award has two categories (ASUU National Award and ASUU UI branch Award).

He added that two out of the beneficiaries, won N200,000 each for the national category, while the remaining four got N100,000 each for the branch award.

Akinwale said that the beneficiaries were chosen following approval by the Evaluation Committee of the union which comprised ASUU members across faculties in the institution.

He added that the beneficiaries were chosen based on indigency and brilliance.



Oyebanji



Akinwale

NEWS

Food Security: Don tasks tertiary institutions

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

PROFESSOR Joseph Ita Omada, former Rector of the Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, and Director, Research Administration at the National Open University of Nigeria, has tasked tertiary institutions across the country to take the lead through technology, vocation, entrepreneurship and training strategies in tackling the nation's food security challenges.

Professor Omada also called on the Nigerian government to hastily attend to security challenges bedeviling the nation so that farmers could put in their best to produce enough food without fear of being attacked.

Omada made the call in a convocation lecture, titled, "Providing National Food Security: The Role of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions" he delivered to mark the 4th Combined Convocation ceremonies of the Kogi State Polytechnic, held at the institution's main campus in Lokoja recently.

He recommended that governments at all levels, should assist farmers with quality seeds and innovative tools like fertilizer as a way out to end the prevailing hunger ravaging communities across the country.

"Dry season and irrigation farming should also be encouraged and supported by government, for both small-and large-scale farmers as well as provision of good roads, water, schools and electricity in rural areas to reduce rural-urban migration".

He affirmed that a lot of gains are derivable from food security, saying that according to a report by USAID (2011), where food is available, accessible, stable and well utilized by all people, peaceful coexistence will be experienced and the nation will record steady development.

Professor Omada enumerated the gains of food security to include; secured human dignity, real opportunity to explore available resources, ensure justice, security at highest level, unlock vast resources of human innovation, experience less hunger, stronger and a healthier nation.

Other gains of food security according to Professor Omada are; betterment of future for children where their brains are developed tremendously, upliftment



Omada

of economy and improvement of household income

"A country that is food secured will attract investors, who will add to the growth and development, as well as improve the economy of the nation. These investors will be employers of labour which in turn will add value to people's lives, reduce levels of unemployment, poverty and hunger"

Professor Omada maintained.

Earlier, the Chairman of the Convocation Lecture and Vice Chancellor of the Federal University, Lokoja, Professor Akinwumi Olayemi, had commended the choice of the lecture topic. He said that it will go a long way in finding a lasting solution to the nation's dwindling economy and food security.

Northern CSO's warn Tinubu of country's imminent collapse

From WILLIE ATTAH, Gombe

THE coalition of Civil Society Organizations in Northern Nigeria has called on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to act fast in addressing the country's socio economic and political challenges to prevent the country from going under.

The coalition while addressing the press over the weekend, particularly expressed concern over what it described as 'looming danger to truncate Nigeria's democracy over the conspicuous fixation to snatch the mandate of the electorate in Kano, Zamfara and Plateau States'.

It also expressed serious concern over the increasing spate of insecurity in some

states of the North, increasing economic hardship on the citizens, reckless borrowings and budget provisions in the 2024 appropriation as well as the need for quick measures before the country goes under.

Chairman of the coalition who doubles up as the Chairman of Kano State Civil Society Forum (KCSF), Ibrahim Waiya, alongside the Secretary, Ibrahim Yusuf, said the coalition works under a common platform, aimed at achieving sustainable socio economic and political development in governance and wellness of Nigerians.

He said, after participating actively in the election processes from the beginning to the end in their various states,

From ABBAS GUNGURA, Bauchi

BAUCHI State Government has directed for a stop on the issuance of Consent Letters to prospective mining investors in the state without getting clearance from the state Ministry of Natural Resources.

The order was made public recently by the Commissioner, Ministry of Natural Resources, Maiwada Bello through a signed press statement issued to journalists by the ministry's information officer, Saleh Umar.

The statement informed that the move was in line with the State Government's policy toward addressing the effects of environmental degradation/pollution associated with mining activities.

It further clarified that the ban was also aimed at addressing security challenges through formulating policies that provide

Mining investors to get clearance letters



Mohammed

an enabling environment for the mining sector to thrive in the state.

The statement said that the approach would enhance investors' confidence in the solid minerals sector.

The commissioner said, "In view of this development, the State Government henceforth

bans individuals, groups and traditional heads from issuance of Consent Letters to any prospective Investors in the state without obtaining clearance from the ministry".

He called on the traditional leaders and other stakeholders in the mining sector, especially investors, to take note and adhere accordingly.

collectively work to avert", it warned.

It also drew the attention of the president on increasing insecurity. He said, "Although it has not been long since the appointment of the new service chiefs in the country and huge investment in the security sector, citizens' expectations are that by now, insecurity of lives and properties should have been brought to the barest minimum level".

The coalition stated however that the continuous killings of people, child trafficking, banditry, displacement of communities, kidnappings, especially in some states of the North, such as: Katsina, Plateau, Sokoto, Niger, Kaduna and Zamfara states, re-surfacing of the insurgency in the North East, is so unprecedented.

"The dimension at which the security for lives and properties of the Nigerian citizens, which is fast declining, puts citizens into more fear, hopelessness and uncertainties", it decried.

It also expressed deep concern over the current state of the judiciary saying, "the conflicting judgments being issued by various courts of the same jurisdiction, have created a sense of confusion and frustration among the citizens. Unfortunately, this has led to a loss of trust and confidence in the judiciary.

"The integrity and effectiveness of our legal system are essential for maintaining public trust and upholding the rule of law. We believe that the Judicial Service Commission has the responsibility and authority to make the necessary reforms to restore faith in the judiciary", the coalition stressed.

It therefore advised President Tinubu to among others, not to allow his government to be used in the manipulative scheme of

interfering with judicial processes in courts, involving cases of election in opposition states to truncate the Nigerian democracy. "It is an offense that would never be forgiven by the entire democratic communities around the world and may lead to chaos, more insecurity and conflicts across the country".

"The NJC should adhere to the latter ethics and practice of their profession, in accordance with the law, as the custodian of justice and rule of law.

"We acknowledge the efforts of some governors like Sokoto, Borno, Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina for their resilience in curtailing the insecurities in their states. However, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, must hold himself and the security agencies accountable, for the ongoing insecurity in the country, and should develop key performance indicators (KPI) of not more than 6 months, for the security agencies to be assessed for accountability.

"We urge the National Security Adviser to coordinate the synergy between the Service Chiefs for optimal combating of insecurities.

The president should, with immediate effect, convey a national economic summit for citizens to identify, deliberate and proffer solutions to the Nigerian economic situation.

"President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, must look inward to raise funds for governance businesses other than borrowings, by squeezing the past and present public officials with corruption allegations to recover the looted funds belonging to Nigerians.

"The conference is appealing to the Judicial Service Commission to take swift action to thoroughly investigate the root causes of the conflicting judgments", the coalition advised.



Tinubu

NEWS

Why prostate, breast cancers are common in Africa -Njar

From MUSLIUDEEN ADEBAYO, Ibadan

AN international renowned medical expert, Professor Vincent Njar has linked the prevalence of prostate and breast cancers in Africa to slave trade.

Njar, a Nigerian who lectures at Maryland University, USA made the disclosure while delivering the First 2024 Distinguished Lecture organized by Lead City University, Ibadan recently.

The event was attended by Chancellor of the University, Professor Ogunmola, Vice Chancellor, Professor Kabir Adeyemo, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Olusola Ladokun and the Registrar, Dr. Oyebola Ayeni.

Njar, while speaking, declared that environmental factors are also responsible for why people in Africa and other black nations are prone to prostate and breast cancers.

Speaking on the topic: "A Journey in Academic Medical Chemistry: Biomolecular Therapeutics Approaches in Prostate, Pancreatic And Breast Cancers (Medical Chemistry and Drug Discovery: Ingenuity and Serendipity or Is It The Other Way Around?), Njar noted that research had shown that when people from Asia migrated from their original abode, the level of prostate and breast



Ogunmola

cancers increased.

Njar, who is a Professor of Medicinal Chemistry and Pharmacology, said the majority of the drugs available for the treatment of prostate and breast cancers are meant to treat white patients because the whites always make themselves available for clinical trials whereas blacks normally shun clinical trials.

Njar, who is currently researching with strong financial support of Maryland University into a multi-million dollar drug called 'Caletrone' that will help in treatment of prostate and breast cancers, explained that it is for Nigeria as a giant in Africa to champion the finance of research that will help in the treatment of prostate and breast cancers and other life-threatening

diseases in Africa.

While answering questions from the audience, Prof. Njar noted that the "Caribbean has the highest rate of deaths and patients of both prostate and breast cancers with researches showing that this is due to their long time association with slave trade.

"Nigeria, through the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and National Institute of Health (NIH) should make funding available for research into drugs that will be black based for the cure of prostate and breast cancers respectively."

He debunked the allegation that the majority of patients die of the side effects of drugs taken in treatment of prostate and breast cancers, declaring that "no drug is absolute

Benue sec approves construction of 2 overpass

From TERESE TUHWA, Makurdi

THE Benue State Executive Council has approved the proposed construction of two overpasses popularly known as flyover bridges in Makurdi the Benue State capital.

Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Sir Tersoo Kula, disclosed this recently, while briefing journalists on the outcome of the Benue State Executive Council meeting

(EXCO) held recently.

According to the governor's spokesman, already exco has directed the Ministry of Works, Housing and Urban Development to carry out a feasibility study on the viability and suitability of the two overpasses which are expected to be situated at Wurukum and High Level roundabouts all in Makurdi, the state capital.

Kula further disclosed that aside from the ongoing township roads in Makurdi, the State Executive Council has also given approval for

the construction of key rural roads with one sitting in each of the three senatorial districts (Benue northeast, west and south) senatorial districts.

The governor's image maker told newsmen that Executive also approved changes in the nomenclature of some ministries, adding that

the decision was to synchronize state ministries with the government at the centre in order to bring more development to the state.

With the new changes, the Ministry of Works & Housing has been changed to Ministry of Works, Housing & Urban Development while Ministry of ICT & Digital Economy has been renamed Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy.

In the same vein, the Ministry of Cooperatives, Urban & Rural Development is now Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development while Ministry of Power and Transport has now become Ministry of Power, Renewable Energy and Transport.

Also, the Ministry of Science, Technology & Innovation has been

THE 8 Division Acting Army Deputy Public Relations Director, Lt Col. Okechukwu Eze has cleared the air on the allegations making the rounds that troops in the North West are not well fed and their allowances not paid as at when due.

In a press release made available to news men to debunk the allegations that were circulated in some On-Line platforms, the 8 Div Acting Army Deputy Public Relations Director, said the GOC has always been personally present with the troops and do feeds from the same source with them.

Lt. Col. Eze also stated that apart from the allowance of December 2023 which is still being processed, troops of the Operation are not owed anything as erroneously claimed by some of the online publishers.

Eze stated that it is pertinent to state that

Northwest : Army debunks allegations of troop's poor welfare

From ANENE AIKE, Sokoto

contrary to the claim of poor feeding of the troops, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 8 Division, who is always physically present as the vanguard of ongoing clearance operations in Zamfara State, to ensure socio-economic activities continue to flourish in the state for the past two weeks, has been feeding from the same source as the troops, demonstrating his commitment to their well-being and morale".

Lt. Col. Eze also hinted that the 8 Division GOC who is the Commander of the Operation Hadarin Daji, runs an inclusive open door policy that encourages any officer or soldier to approach him with their

concerns, ideas and challenges regardless of rank or appointment, to ensure that they discharge their duties effectively.

The spokesman said it is baffling that headquarters which has earnestly prioritized the welfare of its troops has been alleged of depriving them of their entitlements. And added that while they acknowledge that there could be gaps in dispensing troops ration, they could be isolated cases that would have received prompt attention if brought to the knowledge of the authority through available channels of communication, as the GOC places premium on the well-being of his troops.

Eze also swore that they will remain dedicated to the welfare and well-being of the troops and will continue to take all necessary measures to ensure that they are adequately catered for accordingly.

She commended the State Governor for accepting to host the 45th Council Meeting which will go along way in helping the drafting policies and legislation that will expedite the growth of the service for National development.

Dr. Folashade reminded the delegates of their vital responsibilities in repositioning the civil



Lagbaja

School feeding: Kogi sacks cooks over fraudulent activities

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

THE Kogi State Government has sacked 111 cooks in 2022 for allegedly engaging in fraudulent activities during the Federal Government's school feeding programme

in the State.

The Kogi State Focal Person of National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), Abdukareem Onyekéhi Suleiman, disclosed in Lokoja at a public hearing held at the Kogi State House of Assembly on A Bill for a Law for The Establishment of Kogi State Social Investment Programme Agency.

It was gathered that the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) was introduced during former President Muhammadu Buhari's regime with the aim of improving the health status, enrollment and educational outcomes of public primary school pupils.

Onyekéhi averred that the Kogi State Government had engaged 3000 cooks in Kogi for the school feeding programme. He added that some cooks keep engaging in sharp practices after receiving payment from the Federal Government to prepare meals for school pupils.

He said "Whatever you do

in a public office, it is important you ensure accountability and ensure sanctions in case of fraud. We are coordinated. We have Local Government coordinators monitoring the programmes and we are also working with anti-graft agencies and secret service that are part of this programme.

Onyekéhi, who disclosed that not all schools have been captured in the programme, said the government before now has been feeding 177,000 pupils in Kogi State and their target is to capture all the public primary schools in the state to accommodate all pupils in primary 1-3.

While noting that the State Government last recruited over 800 cooks in 2021, the Kogi State Focal Person of NSIP gave reasons why the programme has not continued for sometimes.

Another challenge is that for over a year, we have not done school feeding programme. "Why, because of electioneering, change of government and stabilization of the ministry to continue the programme.



Kula



Suleiman

SUNDAY MAGAZINE



Events that shaped the year 2023

Continued from page 10

presidential election left much to be desired.

On May 11, Hilda Baci a Nigerian set out to break the Guinness World Record (GWR) for longest cooking marathon. In June, she was awarded the record for 93 hours — even though she cooked for 100 hours. Nigerians showed their support, with an estimated 1500 people applying within two months. But only Ekiti State's Chef Dami, who got the heat for challenging Hilda's record right after she'd completed her attempt. Chef Dami embarked on an ambitious 120-hour cook-a-thon, even though she never made an official application to the Guinness World Record team. Hilda Baci visited the GWR London headquarters, barely a week after an Irish chef, Alan Fisher, broke her record and set a new one with 119 hours of cooking and baking on November 7.

Subsidy Removal

Tinubu, upon assuming office, immediately removed the controversial fuel subsidy. During his inauguration speech on May 29, he said: "Subsidy can no longer justify its ever-increasing costs in the wake of drying resources." Not long afterwards, a litre of fuel jumped to ₦617 from ₦198.

In July, Twitter was re-branded X. It was a \$44 billion purchase by Elon Musk. Musk rolled out his payout feature in August, and Nigerian users benefited. A range of features that have both excited users as well as piss them off too were introduced. Verification is now available to anyone who subscribes to Blue, Circle is gone, no tweet character limit.

What's better than one

billionaire's hostile takeover of an iconic social media app? Two billionaires competing against each other with similar social apps. While Musk navigated the murky waters of X, Meta CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, launched his rival app, Threads, in July. And he did this with an iconically humorous tweet, his first post on the platform in 11 years. The app debuted with a staggering 10 million users, and Nigerians massively migrated to the platform.

However, in about four months, Threads did not live up to expectations.

In July, US TikTok, PinkyDoll, went viral for live streaming herself acting like a video game non-playable character (NPC). Her popular catchphrases: "Ice cream, so good", "Geng geng" and "You got me feeling like a cowgirl" filtered into Nigerian TikTok, and we made a mess of it. Nigerians really did act the fool on TikTok.

Then came the VeryDarkBlackman

Martins Vincent Otse AKA VeryDarkBlackman, the Abuja-based influencer, caught the public's attention in July, during his epic battle with Igbino Jennifer, of the popular skincare brand, Jenny's Glow Nigeria. He reported the brand to NAFDAC for not duly registering her range of skincare products, and the agency sealed her Abuja office. This extended to other skincare brands in the country who were forced to act right.

After 51 years, the GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), the multinational Pharmaceutical giant, announced its exit from Nigeria in August. It said the harsh business environment,

and the fluctuating foreign exchange were major reasons for its departure. Their exit led to a rocket-high increase in drug prices. Panadol moved from ₦100 to ₦400, Augmentin from ₦4,000 to ₦20,000, and Ventolin inhaler jumped from ₦1,500 to ₦16,000. Procter & Gamble (P&G) announced that it would stop producing in Nigeria and return to an import-only model about four months after GSK's departure. The company's Chief Financial Officer, Mr. Andre Schulten, also cited the foreign exchange situation as a major driving factor for the decision.

In March, Unilever, producers of OMO, Sunlight and Lux, exited the home care and skin cleansing market in Nigeria. The company's departure was poised to help it find a more sustainable and profitable business model.

The Naira's free fall

September saw the Naira trading between ₦950 and ₦1200 to a dollar from around ₦700 at the beginning of the year. This was a record low, and Nigerians were really worried about the development. We are yet to witness any significant improvement on that.

The election tribunal

After the 2023 presidential election in February, the presidential candidates of PDP and LP were dissatisfied with INEC's result, and headed to the tribunal in March to seek the nullification of the election. The process took months, moving up to the Supreme Court where judgement was delivered in favour of Tinubu.

Atiku continued his fight post-tribunal, leading to an inquiry into Tinubu's university certificate. In October, a US court

ordered the Chicago State University to release the president's academic records. Discrepancies in some of the records suggested that Tinubu's certificate was disputable at best. The Supreme Court eventually dismissed Atiku's suit on grounds that it couldn't entertain evidence that wasn't tendered before the lower court.

Senate presidency

The presidency of the 10th Senate was keenly contested. There were three former governors in the contest, Godswill Akpabio, Orji Kalu, and Abdulaziz Yari, ex-governors of Akwa Ibom, Abia, and Zamfara.

Kalu stepped down, some hours to the election and pledged his support for Kyari, who later on lost to Akpabio.

House Speakership

Tajudeen Abbas was the preferred candidate of the Presidency, but Yusuf Gagdi, Muktar Betara, were the two early birds to indicate interest in the office. The two later pulled out for Abbas. A few hours before the election, Sani Jaji and Ahmed Wase emerged as contenders for the Speakership. Abbas represents Zaria Federal Constituency, Kaduna State on the platform of the APC.

El-Rufai's failed ministerial return

Nasir El-Rufai was one of the eminent APC leaders penciled down for a role in the Tinubu-led government. He was being tipped to be Minister of Power. He however failed at the first hurdle, The Senate.

Off-season elections

The November 11 governorship elections in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states lived up to pundits' predictions. Expectedly, the APC retained Imo and Kogi states with

the re-election of Governor Hope Uzodimma and Ahmed Ododo respectively. In Bayelsa, where the PDP remains the party to beat, Duoye Diri won convincingly, leaving the bid of Timipre Sylva to return for a second and final term in office in tatters.

Plateau Appeal Court judgment

Caleb Mutfwang, Dauda Lawal, and Abba Yusuf, Governors of Plateau, Zamfara, and Kano States respectively appeared to be cut short, or so it appeared when the Appeal Court annulled their election, declaring that their election did not comply significantly with the provisions of the law.

Wike/Fubara

Wike bankrolled his godson and former Accountant General of Rivers State to succeed him as Governor of Rivers. Now, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike is realising that the sheepish loyalty he expected from Governor Siminalayi Fubara is vanishing.

Bokkos Christmas Eve attacks

The report of the scores of killings in villages of Bokkos, Barkin Ladi, and Mangu local governments, sent shockwaves across the globe. At least 140 people were killed and others are missing after a series of attacks by gunmen on remote villages in north-central Nigeria's Plateau state. The killings were blamed on the farmer-herder crisis in Nigeria.

It is our believe that this year 2024 will be a year of success progress and prosperity Nigeria.

It is our believe that this year 2024 will be a year of sources, progress and prosperity in Nigeria

METRO-FOCUS

EZEKIEL DONTINNA

OVERGROWN grasses and shrubs are now the norm around us. The most worrisome are those seen in the heart of the city especially around public spaces, institutions and even offices. For a state whose logo is 'peace and tourism' an unkempt environment calls for concern. It gives us a very bad name among the comity of states.

One of the things most governments are engaged in is selling their states to investors. To sell one's product successfully involves packaging. If Plateau will make a headway in that direction, then some measures have to be taken to make that a reality.

A drive around town has revealed how unkempt the environment around most public institutions are. Take for instance, the long stretch of Airforce Military School fence that faces the road that goes down to Rayfield, seat of government, it is overgrown with shrubs. And it makes the area look bad. In the past, the school authority used to ensure it was well trimmed.

The outward appearance of most offices, schools, institutions are wearing an unkempt outlook. Where there should be flowers, one sees overgrown grasses or shrubs. A good example are properties opposite St Finbarr's Catholic Church, Rayfield. This is the same road that leads to Government House. The attention of the owners of these properties should be drawn to the fact that they have a responsibility to keep the property neat not only inside but outside because it affects how the state looks.

It is also on record that majority of these structures are residential houses of people who do not live here on the Plateau, but wish to have a gigantic building and only employ the services of young people as security to look after their property without any serious maintenance.

Most of these houses are around Rayfield, Millionaires Quarters, Ibrahim Taiwo, JD Gomwalk road, Yakubu Gowon way, Murtala Muhammad way, Apollo Crescent, both State and Federal Low cost, Bukuru Expressway and so on. Sadly, as beautiful as these buildings are, maintaining their surroundings is a problem.

Keeping public spaces neat: Whose responsibility?



We are not in any way discouraging lovers of Jos-Plateau from coming to build here, but helping in making Plateau healthy, beautiful and safe is what we are requesting. It is possible that you were attracted to the state by its serene environment, clement weather, beautiful topographical setting and hospitable nature of its residents. However, we are requesting that you help in making this town more beautiful and attractive.

Unfortunately, more attention is always given to grasses inside the premises, leaving the side facing the road bushy until the exit of the

rainy season where they can set fire to burn them. This is making the beautiful city less attractive and we do not expect the government or Plateau Ministry of Environment to send its cleaners to these institutions or houses to clear the grasses for us.

Although, some few have interlocking to the road lane, the majority of these institutions and houses do not care about what their outside view looks like. For some institutions, all they care about is what their take home pay would be at the end of every month.

They fail to understand that

when you fail to make the environment of your organisation clean and attractive to whoever comes in, you are destroying what it was meant for and it affects patronage especially when it is a business organisation.

Even just for the fear of snakes and other reptiles, one needs not be told to cut those grasses down to avoid any avoidable incidents that may bring pain to us while still at work or on our way out. It is not safe to deliberately create hiding places for these dangerous reptiles in a big city like this.

This has made the beautiful city of Jos look untidy. Dry grasses and shrubs are in abundance on most road paths and some portions of the city centre. It looks like the dry grasses or shrubs have nutritional value, because of their abundance in almost every part of the city.

We commend Governor Caleb Mutfwang, who has re-instituted the monthly sanitation exercise in the state where movement would be restricted from 6am to 10am as was obtained in the past. However, for some months now, it has not been observed. Government needs to stamp its feet to reinstate the practice to change the narrative on the Plateau.

It would be out of place to revisit the old practice of engaging sanitation supervisors who used to be given areas that they covered to make sure residents keep their environment neat. It worked wonders as no one wants to be labeled dirty.

It would be recalled that years back, the state government

contracted waste management to some private organisations, but not much was achieved. Although, it started well but it crashed along the line either for non compliance on the side of the citizens or lack of seriousness on the part of the contractors. Only God knows!

In spite of the several meetings and negotiations between these contractors and the State Ministry of Environment over the years, waste materials and grasses were seen along our major streets. It is possible that the failure of this privatization was what forced government to go back to the old practice of strict monthly sanitation exercise during the last dispensation.

However, even as we advise the government to strictly reinstate the monthly sanitation exercise, it would also be good if the government would instruct institutions and residential houses to not just stay indoors during this exercise as a sign of respect to the order. They should be seen clearing their surroundings. All hands should be on deck to change the look of Plateau State.

In fact, drastic steps should be taken against these institutions or residential houses who deliberately leave grasses to outgrow, so that our dream of being the tourism haven of Nigeria would be achieved. It may not be out of place to keep awareness going so that a fine could be charged against any defaulter.



SUNDAY PEOPLE

STATE TRADITIONAL COUNCIL INTERACTS WITH HD

Plateau State Traditional Council of Chiefs and Emirs last week held interactive session with the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue at the Gbong Gwom Jos Palace, Jishe, Jos



His Majesty, Da Jacob Gyang Buba CFR, Gbong Gwom Jos and President, State Traditional Council of Chiefs (right) receiving some publications and condolence letter from the country Manager, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Dr. Chris Agoha



Cross section of the state Traditional Council of Chiefs and Emirs at the interactive session with the HD



Cross section of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue delegation during the interactive session.



From left are, Emirs of Wase, HRH Alhaji Muhammad Sambo Haruna, HRH Alhaji Muhammad Babangida Mu'azu, the Ngolong Ngas, Nde Jika Golit and Miskaham Mwaghavul, DA John Hirse mni



Emir of Kanam, HRH Alhaji Muhammad Babangida Mu'azu (left) with the Ngolong Ngas, HRH Nde Jika Golit



Long Pan, HRH Nda Emmanuel Dabang, HRH Ada Isaac Wakili of Afizere Chieftom and the Atar Aten of Ganawuri, HRH Yakubu Chairman



HD Country Manager Dr, Chris Agoha signing the visitors register, the representative of the Commissioner, LG and CA, Mr. Sunday Davou Dangwom, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry (left)



His Majesty, Da Jacob Gyang Buba, CFR (middle) Long Gamai His Royal Highness, Miskoom Martin Shaldas in a group photograph with Country Manager, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and members of his team

Photos: DANLADI DUK

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Alcohol and driving

- 1** . What effect can alcohol have on your driving behaviour?
Faulty sense of judgement
Slows down your reaction time
Gives you false confidence
You became a crash looking for where to happen
MEDICATION
 2. You are taking medication which may affect your driving. You should?
Ask your doctor if you may drive and comply with his professional advice
 3. Medication issued with or without prescription may cause drowsiness. TRUE OR FALSE?
True
 4. Driving without breaks may result in fatigue. TRUE OR FALSE?
True
SAFE DISTANCE IN VARIOUS WEATHER CONDITIONS
S A F E
DISTANCE/CLEARANCE
 5. What is the effect of wet road surface on a vehicle's braking ability?
Generally, it doubles the normal braking distance which is required on dry surface
 6. When driving uphill behind a slow-moving vehicle, what should you do?
Stay well behind until it is safe for you to overtake
 7. After overtaking another vehicle, you should...?
Check that you are well past the other vehicle before gradually moving back to the right lane
 8. What is the possible effect of cutting in too soon when overtaking another vehicle?
Both vehicles could collide
 9. When overtaking a parked vehicle, you should...?
Allow sufficient clearance as you pass
 10. What stopping distance should you allow when you suspect that the road may be wet and slippery?
Up to 4 times the normal stopping distance
 11. What clearance should drivers normally allow for parked vehicles?
A door-width
STOPPING DISTANCE AND BRAKING ABILITY
 12. The normal stopping distance of a car or motorcycle travelling at 50km/h on a dry road is...?
25 metres
 13. The normal stopping distance for a car or motorcycle travelling at 50km/h on a wet road is...?
30 metres
 14. The normal stopping distance for a car or motorcycle traveling 100km/h on a dry road is...?
70 metres
 15. The normal stopping distance for a car or motorcycle travelling 100km/h on a wet road is...?
125 metres
 16. Two vehicles each travelling at 100km/h collide head-on. What would be the combined speed at impact?
200km/h
 17. If two vehicles each travelling at 60km/h collide head-on, the speed at impact is...?
120km/h
 18. If two vehicles each travelling at 100km/h collide head-on the speed at impact is...?
200km/h
 19. If two vehicles each travelling at 80km/h collide head-on, the speed at impact is...?
680km/h
 20. The recommended minimum gap per km/h which should be left between vehicles travelling on dry road is...?
1 metre of each km/h
 21. What may happen if you have to brake suddenly on expressway?
The vehicle behind might run into the back of your vehicle
 22. The power of the engine affects the braking distance of the vehicle, TRUE OR FALSE?
False
 23. What must you to enable you judge a safe distance to drive behind the vehicle in front in dry weather?
Allow at least 2 seconds to elapse between the vehicle in front and your vehicle passing a fixed point
 24. What must you to enable you judge a safe distance to drive behind the vehicle in front in wet weather?
Allow at least 4 seconds to elapse between the vehicle in front and your vehicle passing a fixed point
 25. Only a fool breaks the two second rule. TRUE OR FALSE?
True
 26. What effect does overloading have on your vehicle's braking ability?
It increases the stopping distance
 27. What effect does towing a loaded vehicle have on stopping ability?
It significantly increases the stopping distance
NIGHT DRIVING
 28. When driving at night your headlights enables you to see a distance of how many metres?
100 metres
 29. When driving at night your dipped headlights enables you to see a distance of how many metres?



NEWS

Kogi sacks cooks over fraudulent activities

From AMEDU JOSEPH, Lokoja

THE Kogi State Government has sacked 111 cooks in 2022 for allegedly engaging in fraudulent activities during the Federal Government's school feeding programme in the State.

The Kogi State Focal Person of National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), Abdulkareem Onyeki Suleiman, disclosed in Lokoja at a public hearing held at the Kogi State House of Assembly on A Bill for a Law for The Establishment of Kogi State Social Investment Programme Agency.

It was gathered that the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) was introduced during former President Muhammadu Buhari's regime with the aim of improving the health status, enrollment and educational outcomes of public primary school pupils.

Onyeki averred that the Kogi State Government had engaged 3000 cooks in Kogi for the school feeding programme. He added that some cooks keep engaging in sharp practices after receiving payment from the Federal Government to prepare meals for school pupils.

He said "Whatever you do in a public office, it is important you ensure accountability and ensure sanctions in case of fraud. We are coordinated. We have Local Government coordinators monitoring the programmes and we are also working with anti-graft agencies and secret service that are part of this programme.

"We have had cases where some cooks that were supposed to be preparing meals for school pupils

received money and they did not prepare the meals. We have about 3000 cooks and we have disciplined 111 of them in recent times.

"We recommend them for removal from the scheme and we have reported them to the appropriate authority for discipline and punishment they deserve. We found out that they received money and they did not prepare meals for our school pupils.

"Some of them are also not doing it in line with the guidelines. All these things, we have our report and we have given appropriate punishment. We have also made arrests of some people who commit fraud in the various Local Governments concerning other interventions from the government to cushion the hardship in our country.

"We are not taking it likely from anybody. Immediately the agency gets its report, we always swing into action and sanction whoever violates the programme or defrauds the people of Kogi State.

Onyeki, who disclosed that not all schools have been captured in the programme, said the government before now has been feeding 177,000 pupils in Kogi State and their target is to capture all the public primary schools in the state to accommodate all pupils in primary 1-3.

While noting that the State Government last recruited

over 800 cooks in 2021, the Kogi State Focal Person of NSIP gave reasons why the programme has not continued for sometimes.

"The Federal Government is carrying out enumeration and revalidation exercises to continue the process. They could not approve the additional cooks yet to capture more schools that will accommodate more pupils that have not benefited from the programme.

Another challenge is that for over a year, we have not done school feeding programme. "Why, because of electioneering, change of government and stabilization of the ministry to continue the programme.

"In 2020, there was no school feeding program at all because of the COVID-19 pandemic and 2021 began towards end of the year. As a result we have been relatively inconsistent in the programme.

"We hope that in the renewed Hope mantra of President Tinubu, we are going to hit the ground running and make the programme more consistent and frequent in a bid to meet the objective of the government. On our own, we are going to initiate our own state policy that will complement the policy of the federal government by doing it differently in line with the peculiarity of our state to ensure we alleviate poverty in Kogi State," he stated.

22,000 applicants applied for police constable from Bauchi

From ABBAS GUNGURA, Bauchi

BAUCHI State Commissioner of Police, Auwal Muhammad Musa, has said that 22,000 applicants applied for recruitment into the Nigeria Police Force in the ongoing recruitment exercise in Bauchi Command.

The Bauchi Police boss made this known while briefing journalists after monitoring the recruitment process of

the police constables at Police Training Center, Yalwa in Bauchi recently.

Auwal Musa warned against any form of corruption in the ongoing recruitment exercise as the aim is to produce the best for the Nigeria Police.

Our correspondent in Bauchi who covered the occasion, reports that the applicants representing the 20 LGAs of the state, are currently undergoing thorough screening at the Police Training School, Bauchi under the watchful

eyes of the representatives of Police Service Commission (PSC), Federal Character Commission (FCC), Ministry of Police Affairs, Bauchi State Office of the Head of Service and Police Training Department.

The nature of the applicants' thorough screening includes checking their credentials, height and chest measurements, flat feets and light medical observation to ascertain their health condition preparatory to the actual training after shortlisting.

The CP expressed satisfaction with the way and manner the process was going and therefore commended all officials for their commitment.

He also hailed the Federal Government, the IGP and the Chairman, Police Service Commission for their efforts to increase the number of Police personnel to meet the security challenges in the country.



Egbetekun

SUNDAY FEATURE

University degree saga: Changing the Nigeria academic narrative

The unfolding university degree saga in Nigeria has brought to the fore the need for our country to look inward and strengthen our academic heritage. It is pretty unfortunate where we have found ourselves as a country. I am not a beneficiary of the heydays when university students each chicken on Sundays, but the system has continued to nosedive year in and year out, writes OLUTAYO IRANTIOLA.

IT is getting to a point where the federal government needs to evaluate its students across the globe so that we can effectively understand our situation. What do people want from the Nigerian educational system to ascertain where we are getting it wrong? This brings to mind the number of students who are "exiled" so that they can get globally competitive certificates. In 2022 and 2023 respectively, Nigerian students have experienced war in Sudan, Russia and Ukraine.

One of the most disheartening things about our tertiary institution is that passing the West African Examinations Council (WASC) examination, Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board Examinations, and post-JAMB of the various institutions, you are not guaranteed admission into your course of choice and even the university of choice. You have to scramble for admission; seek a lecturer to help follow up on your admission. All these gave rise to people seeking admission in neighbouring countries.

With a burgeoning youthful population, there is a need for the government to enlarge the capacity of the various institutions, but we keep tightening the admission measures as typified above. We cannot continue to allot admission quota to institutions every session and expect parents who do not know anyone to keep their children at home for years while awaiting admission.

Until recently, first-class degrees were rare in federal and state universities because many lecturers believed that God was the only one who owned first-class while the lecturer owned second-class upper degrees, and students could jostle second-class lower and third-class degrees. Notwithstanding, the labour market had labelled students with such degrees as "half-baked and unemployable". All these made parents get loans to train their children in all these mushroom institutions in the neighbouring countries.

Aside from the deep-pocket Nigerians who can afford to send their children to Ivy League universities in Europe and America, people are looking for ways in which their wards will save years in the university due to the incessant strikes that last many months. Meanwhile, the government and the academic

workforce have little or nothing to lose at the expense of the students' lives. How long will Nigerian students have a timeline for completing a bachelor's degree programme?

Another issue we have as a country is the conversion of all tertiary levels of education to Universities. No institution trains teachers again; it is now a university; no institution trains technicians again, and everyone wants to become an engineer. People without a university education cannot go beyond certain levels in civil service, among other limitations we place on our nationals. Then, people can troop into another country to get a university degree of any type. This unrealistic demand of society has pushed students out of the country.

It might be a bitter pill to swallow, but people will want to go for any form of education, and the recent increase in fees paid in Nigerian tertiary institutions is not encouraging. Truly, the government is doing everything to reduce subsidy across the board, but Nigerians cannot see the additional value to the students. People will only go for a shortcut to beat the

system as well.

There is a growing phenomenon now, Nigerians are gunning for honorary doctorate degrees, and all of these degrees are coming from the same institutions that the ministry of education is suspending the accreditation and evaluation of degree certificates from in Benin Republic, Togo, Uganda, Kenya and Niger Republic. Do we need to wait for a Crisis to break out before

we take the appropriate steps?

I am not justifying wrongs, but it is a charge for the government and academic leaders to wake up from their age-long slumber; they need to find ways of redeeming the educational image of the country and overhauling the educational sector. A quote by the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, "To attain the goals of economic freedom and prosperity,

Nigeria must do certain things as a matter of urgency and priority. It must provide free education at all levels and free health facilities for the masses of its citizens". If it is not free now, we need to get it right if we will stop falling to the tricks being paid on Nigerians by other countries in our search for certificates.

Irantiola, a Lagos-based PR Consultant, Playwright and Biographer, blogs on www.peodavies.com.

"There is a growing phenomenon now, Nigerians are gunning for honorary doctorate degrees, and all of these degrees are coming from the same institutions that the ministry of education is suspending the accreditation and evaluation of degree certificates from in Benin Republic, Togo, Uganda, Kenya and Niger Republic. Do we need to wait for a Crisis to break out before we take the appropriate steps?"



SUNDAY SPORTS

Will Japan win a fifth Asian Cup?

THE Asian Cup takes place in Qatar from 12 January to 10 February with a host of English and Scottish club sides set to be without key players for up to six weeks.

The competition had originally been awarded to China and was set to take place in the summer of 2023, before the country's Covid-19 restrictions led to a change of hosts, with Qatar then awarded the right to stage the tournament.

Just as the 2022 World Cup had been, the event was then moved because of the heat from the summer to the winter.

Seven of the nine venues for the Asian Cup held World Cup matches just over a year ago, with the final again set to be held at the Losail Stadium.

What is the format?

There are 24 nations taking part, with six groups of four. The top two in each section will qualify automatically for the last 16 and will be joined by the four third-placed sides with the best records.

From then on it is a knockout format, ending with the final on 10 February and there is no third-fourth play-off. The group stage lasts from 12-25 January, the last-16 ties are between 28-31 January, the quarter-finals are 2-3 February with the semi-finals on 6 and 7 February.

Australia: Nathaniel Atkinson (Hearts), Keanu Baccus (St Mirren), Martin Boyle (Hibernian), Cameron Burgess (Ipswich), Gethin Jones (Bolton), Riley McGree (Middlesbrough), Lewis Miller (Hibernian), Kye Rowles (Hearts), Samuel Silvera (Middlesbrough), Harry Souttar (Leicester), Marco Tilio (Celtic), Kusini Yengi (Portsmouth).

Hong Kong: Sean Tse (Radcliffe - Northern Premier League, Premier Division).

Indonesia: Elkan Baggott (Ipswich), Justin Hubner (Wolves).

Iran: Saman Ghoddos (Brentford).



Qatar won the Asian Cup in 2019, beating Japan 3-1 in the final

Iraq: Ali Al-Hamadi (AFC Wimbledon).

Japan: Wataru Endo (Liverpool), Reo Hatate (Celtic), Daizen Maeda (Celtic), Kaoru Mitoma (Brighton), Yuta Nakayama (Huddersfield), Takehiro Tomiyasu (Arsenal).

Lebanon: Omar Bugiel (AFC Wimbledon).

South Korea: Hwang Hee-chan (Wolves), Kim Ji-soo (Brentford), Oh Hyeon-gyu (Celtic), Son Heung-min (Tottenham), Yang Hyun-jun

(Celtic). Brendan Rodgers' Celtic will have the most players missing with five absent, while AFC Wimbledon, Brentford, Hearts, Hibernian, Ipswich, Middlesbrough and Wolves all have two players apiece at the tournament.

Arsenal, Bolton, Brighton, Huddersfield, Leicester, Liverpool, Portsmouth, St Mirren and Tottenham all have one player apiece, as do Radcliffe, who play in the Northern Premier

League, Premier Division - the seventh tier of English football.

forward Son Heung-min are among those selected by their countries in the Asian Cup

How many domestic games will players miss at the Asian Cup?

One of the highest-profile players to be competing in the Asian Cup is Tottenham and South Korea forward **Son Heung-min**.

He will miss Spurs' Premier League match away at Manchester United on 14 January.

Depending on how far South Korea progress in the tournament, he could also be out of their FA Cup fourth-round tie against Manchester City (date to be confirmed) and Premier League matches against Brentford (31 January), Everton (3 February) and Brighton (10 February).

Liverpool and Japan midfielder **Wataru Endo** could miss eight matches for the Reds, and was absent for Wednesday's Carabao Cup semi-final first leg against Fulham.

Wolves and South Korea forward **Hwang Hee-chan** could be out for five or six club games, depending on the result of their FA Cup third round replay against Brentford, while Arsenal and Japan defender **Takehiro Tomiyasu** is also missing a significant number of matches.

Brighton winger **Kaoru Mitoma** has been named in Japan's squad, although it remains to be seen if he features at the tournament after Seagulls boss Roberto de Zerbi **said his player**

was injured.

"I'm really surprised because my medical staff told me Mitoma needs four, six weeks for his injury," said De Zerbi, speaking before Tuesday's Premier League goalless draw with West Ham.

"For me, it's difficult to think he can play in the Asian Cup. But I'm a fan of Mitoma, of all my players, so if they can play for their national team I'm very happy and very proud."

The break in the Scottish season has come at a good time for Celtic and Rodgers may only be without his selected players for a maximum of four matches.

Japan, at 17th, are the highest Asian nation in Fifa's world rankings, followed by Iran (21st), South Korea (23rd) and Australia (25th).

Saudi Arabia (56th in the world) recorded a huge shock in the 2022 World Cup when they defeated an Argentina side that went on to win the tournament.

Qatar (ranked 58th) are the reigning champions and will be looking to repeat their success on home soil. They are in the same group as Tajikistan, the only nation appearing at the tournament for the first time.

The lowest three ranked nations are Malaysia (130th), Indonesia (146th) and Hong Kong (150th).

Japan have won the tournament four times, one more than Saudi Arabia and Iran. South Korea have won the competition twice with one success for Israel, Kuwait, Australia, Iraq and Qatar.



Arsenal's Japanese defender Takehiro Tomiyasu and Tottenham's South Korean

SUNDAY SPORTS

Raducanu 'feeling good' in Melbourne

EMMA Raducanu has allayed any fears about her fitness before making a Grand Slam comeback at the Australian Open.

The 21-year-old Briton returned to competitive action in Auckland last week after eight months out following operations on her wrists and ankle.

Raducanu pulled out of two exhibition events in Melbourne this week but has practised and shown no signs of issues.

"For a few days after the matches I was sore but I've bounced back from that and I'm feeling good now," she said.

Raducanu is playing in the first Grand Slam of the 2024 season using an injury-protected ranking of 103rd in the world.

She moved directly into the main draw, without needing to qualify or receive a wildcard, after several withdrawals from higher-ranked players.

Raducanu will play American Shelby Rogers - who the Briton beat on the way to winning the US Open in 2021 - in the first round on Monday or Tuesday.

"I've been doing the right work, doing it consistently. I just need to keep going more and more."

In her pre-tournament news conference on Friday,



Raducanu

she added: "I think my level, to be honest, is just too good not to come through if I put consistent work together."

GB's Crawford loses final Australian Open qualifier

Raducanu opened her comeback tournament in Auckland with a win against Romania's Elena-Gabriela Ruse, then produced a high level against Wimbledon semi-finalist Elina Svitolina before fading physically in a deciding set which she lost 6-1.

Afterwards Raducanu had some soreness and decided it would not be in her best

interests to play in the exhibition matches - one at Melbourne Park as part of the Australian Open's fan week and another against Russian 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva at the Kooyong Classic.

Instead Raducanu did full practice sessions at Melbourne Park this week and hit with British number two Jodie Burrage on Friday.

"It's nice to see her back on the court, back playing some really good stuff as well. It will be really interesting to see what she does this week."

RORY McIlroy began his 2024 season in superb fashion as he carded a bogey-free 62 to set the early pace at the inaugural Dubai Invitational.

World number two McIlroy hit nine birdies to lead on nine under, two clear of Germany's Yannik Paul.

England's Tommy Fleetwood finished with a birdie to card a bogey-free five-under 66.

Nicolai Hojgaard, McIlroy and Fleetwood's European Ryder Cup team-mate, is five back after a 67.

Starting on the 10th hole at Dubai Creek Resort, McIlroy picked up two birdies in his opening six holes before reeling off five in six from the 17th to the fourth.

The four-time major winner closed out his round with further birdies at the seventh and ninth.

Speaking to Sky Sports after his round, McIlroy said "I surprised myself a little bit" with how well he played.

"I didn't expect that," said McIlroy.

"It didn't feel quite as good as that the first couple of days when I was here hitting balls and playing the course but it was nice to get

McIlroy two cards superb 62 to lead Dubai Invitational

a card in the hand again and feel the competitive juices flowing.

"I surprised myself a little bit but hopefully more of the same over the next few days."

The five-time Race to Dubai winner added: "These pro-ams, I'm usually playing with my dad or this week with the tournament host, so there's maybe a bit of added pressure.

"But it's an easy week to get back into things and this is a nice week to do some extra practice so that I feel ready, not just for next week, which is

obviously a bigger event [the Dubai Desert Classic], but going into the bulk of the season."

The Dubai Invitational consists of 60 professionals and 60 amateurs. The 72-hole individual strokeplay tournament is played concurrently with a 54-hole pro-am team event, which runs from Thursday to Saturday.

There is no cut in the 72-hole pro event.

McIlroy, who is playing for the first time since November, will remain in the Middle East next week to defend his Dubai Desert Classic title.



McIlroy carded nine birdies during a flawless start to his 2024 season

Solanke is Premier League player of month for December



Dominic Solanke (centre) scored all three goals as Bournemouth beat Nottingham Forest 3-2 in the Premier League in December

DOMINIC Solanke has become the first Bournemouth player to be voted as the Premier League's player of the month.

The 26-year-old striker scored six times in December to take his tally to 12 league goals so far this season, plus one in the Carabao Cup.

Among Solanke's highlights last month was a first career hat-trick in the Cherries' 3-2 win away to Nottingham Forest on 23 December.

His impressive form has helped Bournemouth climb to 12th in the table.

The former Chelsea and Liverpool forward, who won one full England cap in

2017, has doubled his league goal tally from last season, when he scored six times in 33 appearances.

He is level in third place with Tottenham's Son Heung-min in the Premier League top scorers list, two behind Manchester City's Erling Haaland and Liverpool's Mohamed Salah.

Bournemouth are in their seventh season in the top flight, but although former boss Eddie Howe earned multiple manager of the month awards, and Charlie Daniels and Jermain Defoe won goal of the month awards, no Cherries player had previously been named as player of the month.

Aston Villa boss Unai Emery was named manager of the month after guiding the club to four wins and two draws from their seven matches in December, including back-to-back victories over Manchester City and Arsenal without conceding a goal.

Villa are second in the Premier League, three points behind leaders Liverpool, going into Sunday's match against Everton at Goodison Park.

"I'm thankful and very proud of our work," Emery said. "The most important thing is to be consistent, be demanding, and try to improve every day."

Alia donates new vehicles to Lobi Stars FC

THE Benue State Governor, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Alia, has donated four new vehicles to Lobi Stars Football Club of Makurdi to ease the team's transportation challenge.

The governor made the donation at the Government House, Makurdi recently when the players and officials of the team led by its Vice Chairman, Mr. Dominic Lorfa, paid a courtesy call on the governor to appreciate him for the support the team has enjoyed under his administration.

Governor Alia who appreciated the club for its wonderful performances in the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL) so far this season, said the excellent

results the team has achieved have put smiles on the faces of many Benue people.

The governor urged the team to maintain the momentum throughout the season and promised to ensure that the Aper Aku Stadium was upgraded to an international standard before the end of 2023/2024 Nigerian Professional League Season to enable the team start playing their home matches in Makurdi.

He described the group of players as the best, promising to continue to provide the team with a lot of cushions as a form of motivation.

Earlier in his address, the Chairman of Lobi Stars Football Club, Barr. Sam Ode, thanked the governor for the enormous

support he has given the club, insisting that support was the reason the team was doing well in the ongoing NPFL season.

He appreciated the Vice Chairman, Mr. Dominic Lorfa for the work and energy he has put into the club. He described him as a sports enigma whom despite all the skepticism surrounding the club at the beginning of the season, he has propelled the club to the top, challenging for top honours in the country.

In their separate remarks, Vice Chairman of the Club, Mr. Dominic Lorfa and the club's captain, Daniel Atsaka while congratulating the governor on his Supreme Court victory said the club has enjoyed the best welfare packages so far under his administration, saying the players and officials have not taken that for granted as reflected in the performances of the team.

They called on people of the state to continue to support the team for more positive results as the season progresses.

In a remark while receiving the vehicles, Commissioner for Youths, Sports and Creativity, Rt. Hon. Terkimbi Ikyange, thanked the governor for the donation as well as showing love for sports and creativity. He promised to ensure that the team makes judicious use of



Mr. Dominic Lorfa

SUNDAY SPORTS



Palmer penalty gives Chelsea their third league win

COLE Palmer was the decisive figure for Chelsea again as the Blues' 1-0 home win over west London rivals Fulham gave them three straight Premier League victories for the first time in 15 months.

The 21-year-old converted a penalty in first-half stoppage time, scoring his ninth goal of the season and taking Chelsea up to eighth in the table, above Manchester United on goal difference.

Fulham's defeat extends their miserable record at Stamford Bridge, where they are winless in 19

Chelsea dominated possession in the opening 15 minutes but were unable to create a chance that troubled Bernd Leno.

Conor Gallagher fired over and Armando Broja headed wide, but it was Fulham who forced the first save as Antonee Robinson crossed beyond the far post to Harry Wilson, whose first-time shot was parried by Djordje Petrovic at his near post.

Chelsea continued to struggle to create clear openings until first-half stoppage time. A clever disguised pass by Palmer found Raheem Sterling, who was brought down in the box by Issa Diop, and Palmer buried his penalty into the bottom-right corner.

Palmer's ninth goal of the season equalled the club record for the most strikes in a Premier League campaign by a player aged 21 or younger, after Christian Pulisic's tally in 2019/20.

The second half followed a similar pattern, with Chelsea struggling to add to their lead and Fulham threatening sporadically at the other end.

In the 53rd minute Robinson picked out Raul Jimenez, who was unable to direct his header towards goal. Then in the 72nd minute Andreas Pereira drove into the box and cut back the ball to Jimenez, whose low shot towards the bottom-left corner was well saved by Petrovic.

Chelsea nearly got the breathing room they craved with eight minutes remaining as Gallagher's excellent effort with the outside of his boot hit the left post. But instead they had to survive a nervy finish.

A late free-kick from former Chelsea player Willian caused a scramble and the ball fell to Bobby De Cordova-Reid, whose goalbound shot was inadvertently blocked by team-mate Diop. That was followed by a game of head-tennis in Chelsea's box in the fifth minute of stoppage time, with the Blues eventually lashing the ball away with the final kick of the match.

Fulham, who are now winless in their last 10 away league matches, sit 13th on 24 points, eight points above the relegation zone.

Chelsea want £100m Ferguson, Real Madrid switch to Osimhen

THE January transfer window has been slow to get going this month but may be starting to heat up as clubs try to bolster their squads for the second half of the season.

This month, Arsenal and Chelsea are expected to be two of the teams trying to bring in at least one player each, with Ivan Toney a name on both clubs' wishlists. Brighton striker Evan Ferguson has also been linked with the Blues, although the Seagulls value the teenager at more than £100m. Given the strictness of financial fair play rules, any signings might depend on sales though.

Tottenham and Liverpool could look to bring in reinforcements to deal with the likes of Son Heung-min and Mohamed Salah being absent at mid-season international tournaments. Spurs have completed the signing of Genoa's Radu Dragusin to

improve their defence and added Timo Werner to their attack, while Chelsea eye Napoli striker Victor Osimhen, but could face competition from Real

Jordan Henderson is in talks to join Italian giants Juventus on loan as he looks to make an early escape from his controversial move to Saudi Arabia, according to reports.

The 33-year-old left Liverpool to move to the Middle East just six months ago, joining Saudi's PIF-backed Al-Ettifaq – becoming the Premier League's most high-profile player to do so in the process.

But he is said to be unsettled in Saudi Arabia and struggling with the heat and humidity of the playing conditions.

Al-Ettifaq's poor attendance figures – which has seen an average of just over 7,000 fans at each game this season – are also a contributing factor, as is the backlash he faced from the LGBTQ+ community over the move to Saudi.

Henderson had hoped to secure a return to the Premier League but has had precious little interest, though Dutch giants Ajax have enquired about his availability.

Now Gazzetta dello Sport are reporting that Juventus have made a play to sign Henderson and are in advanced talks with the player and his entourage.

Juve are hoping to secure a loan rather than a transfer, something Al-Ettifaq are willing to accommodate with the

Henderson closing Saudi, escape with Italian giants Juventus



Henderson

Saudi league wary of preventing unhappy players from leaving as it could hinder their attempts to attract players in the future.

Six alternative channels to watch AFCON 2023 matches

Following the announcement by Multichoice, the sub-Saharan African broadcast heavyweight, owner of Cable platform DSTV, that SuperSport

pay-TV service will not broadcast live matches of the 2023 AFCON, Nigerians have been scrambling for alternative ways to watch the continent's biggest football competition.

The Nation had reported that MultiChoice, owner of Cable platform DSTV, last week announced that it will not broadcast the 2023 African Cup of Nations (AFCON) on SuperSport (SS), after failing to secure a broadcast rights agreement with the Confederation of African Football (CAF).

The loss of rights to AFCON is a significant blow to MultiChoice, with the media giant having broadcast every edition since 1992.

The tournament which was scheduled to hold in 2023, was postponed due to extreme weather conditions in Ivory Coast and will kick off from January 13 to February 11, 2024.

Here are other channels for Nigerian fans to watch live matches from the 2023 AFCON.

Nigerians can turn to the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), the country's most prominent television station and enjoy the 2023 AFCON.



Ferguson

SUNDAY SPORTS



Man City's title rivals fear De Bruyne's return

ALX Keble takes a look at what Kevin De Bruyne's return can mean for Manchester City's title ambitions.

Throughout the first half of Man City's stuttering 2023/24 campaign a shadow has loomed large over the Premier League. Their rivals have tried not to think about it. Pundits excited by a five-way title challenge have pretended it wasn't there.

But we all knew this day was coming. De Bruyne is back – and just like that, Man City are transformed.

De Bruyne might not start at Newcastle United on Saturday, yet that doesn't mean he won't play a major part. He is raring to go.

Within 17 minutes of coming off the bench in their comfortable 5-0 FA Cup third-round victory over Huddersfield Town last weekend, he had notched his first assist since the Community Shield, driving to the right-hand byline and chipping a neat cross to the back post for Jeremy Doku to score.

It was an ominous moment for the rest of the Premier League. Those crosses, that unique creativity, is something Man City have been missing all season.

Man City have won 40 points from the first 19 matches of this season, which is the third time they have had 40 points or less at the halfway stage since Pep Guardiola's arrival. They didn't

win the title in either of the previous two, coming third in Guardiola's 2016/17 debut season with 78 points and second in 2019/20, earning 81 points.

No matter what other problems are afflicting Man City, from a post-Treble hangover to full-back issues and a summer downgrade in central midfield, clearly De Bruyne has been missed.

Alex Keble analyses the challenges Pep Guardiola faces after his worst start to a Premier League season

Julian Alvarez, and more recently Phil Foden, have been playing in an advanced midfield position across the season, and across pretty much every key creative statistic, Foden and Alvarez haven't adequately replaced De Bruyne.

Meanwhile Nathan revealed that, Manchester City's senior players held a meeting last month to address the champions' poor run of form.

In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, the defender said City's captains' group, consisting of Kyle Walker, Kevin De Bruyne, Ruben Dias, Rodri and Bernardo Silva, met amid a run of one win in six Premier League matches that dropped City down to fourth in the table, six points behind then leaders Arsenal.

"We had a big get-together organised by the captains and we had a good talk with each other," Ake told *Telegraph Sport*.

"Not to hammer each other but

to be honest that everyone has to look at themselves to see what

"We want to win games and get the season going again and we had to do it now while there were still so many games to go.

"The time was still there to do it because we would rather have had the conversation then than in five weeks when we could have been even more points behind."

City have since responded with back-to-back wins over Everton and Sheffield United that have lifted the side to third, five points behind leaders Liverpool with a match in hand ahead of a trip to Newcastle United on Saturday.

"We talked with each other about it to try to understand and

make sure everyone was on the same page - that we don't just play the victim card of deflections or a difficult moment," Ake added.

The get-together was similar to one called three years ago by former City captain Fernandinho on New Year's Day after a sub-par training session. That meeting helped inspire City to a third Premier League title in four years.

"We have to do better as individual players and defenders but everyone was allowed to say whatever they wanted and we picked it up.

"We set the standards really

high for ourselves. So it's a good thing that we still have this character to keep going."

The defender added that their title rivals slipping up over the festive period also helped to inspire the team ahead of the fixtures against Everton and Sheff Utd.

"We struggled a bit at one point but the gap is not too big so that motivated us as well.

"[We said], 'Okay, win these two games and we're there again and can compete again', knowing normally towards the end of the season we start to kick on and hopefully we're going to do the same."





AFCON 2024:

Nigeria vs Equatorial Guinea



Super eagles

The Super Eagles of Nigeria will begin their AFCON 2024 Group C campaign with a clash against Equatorial Guinea on Sunday.

The three time Champions are looking to earn their first title in over a decade having last triumphed with the Stephen Keshi led side back in 2013. At the last edition of the tournament, the Eagles kept a 100% group stage record, beating Egypt, Guinea Bissau and Sudan, to finish as Group Winners. However, they were knocked out at the last 16 stage following a 1-0 loss to Tunisia. Since then, the West Africans have been rejigging their squad to become as competitive as they were before.

Having failed to qualify for the last World Cup in Qatar, the Eagles will be keen on getting their AFCON campaign off to a winning start as it could boost their hopes of going all the way in the competition. They head into this tie on the back of

a 2-0 loss to Guinea in an international friendly. That game further created more questions about gaffer Jose Peseiro and the tactics he intends to deploy when the tournament gets underway. It also compounded the form of

the team as they are now without a win in all competitions since beating Mozambique 3-2 last October. This tournament is a chance for Peseiro to win the hearts of Nigerian fans who have been left frustrated by the poor performances of the team

in recent games. For Equatorial Guinea, they are back to the continental showpiece after their two previous appearances in 2012 and 2015 when they featured as hosts. Here, they face a relatively tough

opposition as they have to get favourable results against much experienced sides like hosts Ivory Coast and first group phase opponents Nigeria. Unlike the Eagles, Equatorial Guinea boasts of a good run of form heading into

this tie with 4 wins and 3 draws in their last 7 matches. They will be hoping to build on this form and begin the tournament on a positive note.

The Super Eagles have a strong, expensive and experienced squad going into this tournament with the current African footballer of the year, Victor Osimhen, expected to lead the line and replicate his goal scoring form during the qualifiers. The Napoli man will also be looking to edge his name in the history books following in the footsteps of great players like Rasheed Yekini and co. Unfortunately, the Eagles have been dealt a blow by the injury suffered by Leverkusen man Victor Boniface. Nevertheless, they have called up Nice striker Terem Moffi as a replacement. Leicester City's Wilfred Ndidi will be missing in action and Alhassan Yusuf has been called up as his replacement.

Both sides have met three times with Nigeria emerging victorious in all three. The last time both sides met was in the African Nations Championship (CHAN), a tournament set aside for home based players in Africa. At the time, the home based Super Eagles won 3-1. While the current Super Eagles have loads of issues to sort out especially at the back and goal keeping department, the players in their roster and the kind of experience they bring to the table makes this an uphill battle for Equatorial Guinea.

The best of African football is upon us as teams go head to head and jostle for the continent's most coveted prize in men's football. This is certainly going to be a thrilling contest as both sides hope to begin their campaign on a promising note. Given Nigeria's better said quality and Equatorial Guinea's seemingly good record defensively looking at their last three games, we are expecting Nigeria to win or draw with less than four goals scored.

Cameroon vs Guinea AFCON kick-off time

GROUP C of the Africa Cup of Nations gets underway on Monday, with Cameroon taking on Guinea.

Senegal face Gambia earlier in the day, before the focus shifts to Cameroon and Guinea getting their AFCON campaigns underway.

Cameroon were hosts two years ago and finished third on home soil, losing to Egypt on penalties in the semi-finals before then coming out on top in a shootout when they beat Burkina Faso in the third-place play-off.

Guinea impressed in holding Senegal to a draw and reaching the knockout stages, and since 1998 have only once failed to make it out of their group when qualifying for the

tournament.

Cameroon vs Guinea is scheduled for a 5pm BST kick-off on Monday, January 15, 2024.

The match will take place at the Charles Konan Banny Stadium in Yamoussoukro.

TV channel: In the UK, the game will be televised live on Sky Sports.

Live stream: Subscribers can also catch the contest live online via the Sky Go app.

Live blog: You can follow all the action on matchday via Standard Sport's live blog.

Cameroon have not been in particularly impressive form, drawing a warm-up match with Zambia and they were also held by Libya in a World Cup qualifier in November.

Guinea though will be full

of confidence after a friendly win over Nigeria, and they look well capable of causing Cameroon problems in what could be a tight affair.

Cameroon are without Bryan Mbeumo, after the Brentford star had ankle surgery last month to rule

him out of the tournament.

It remains to be seen whether goalkeeper Andre Onana is available, after it was decided he would play for Manchester United against Tottenham and then immediately fly out just 24 hours before his country's opener.

