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Nigerians 'sidon dey look' as Tinubu throttles on reforms



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Nigerian Navy's 'Delta Sanity': Raising the stakes in the fight against oil theft



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How INEC's moral burden is affecting elections after 2023



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Dangote's refinery, Onyema's Air Peace hold bright hope for Nigeria's future - Agbakoba

■ Tunde Rahman, Presidential aide, hails Onyema

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■ Private sector group rallies round Air Peace, urges FG to step up, protect national interest

Concern grows over Nigeria's future with criminal-minded youth



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Between NFF hunt for new Super Eagles' handler and call for local coach

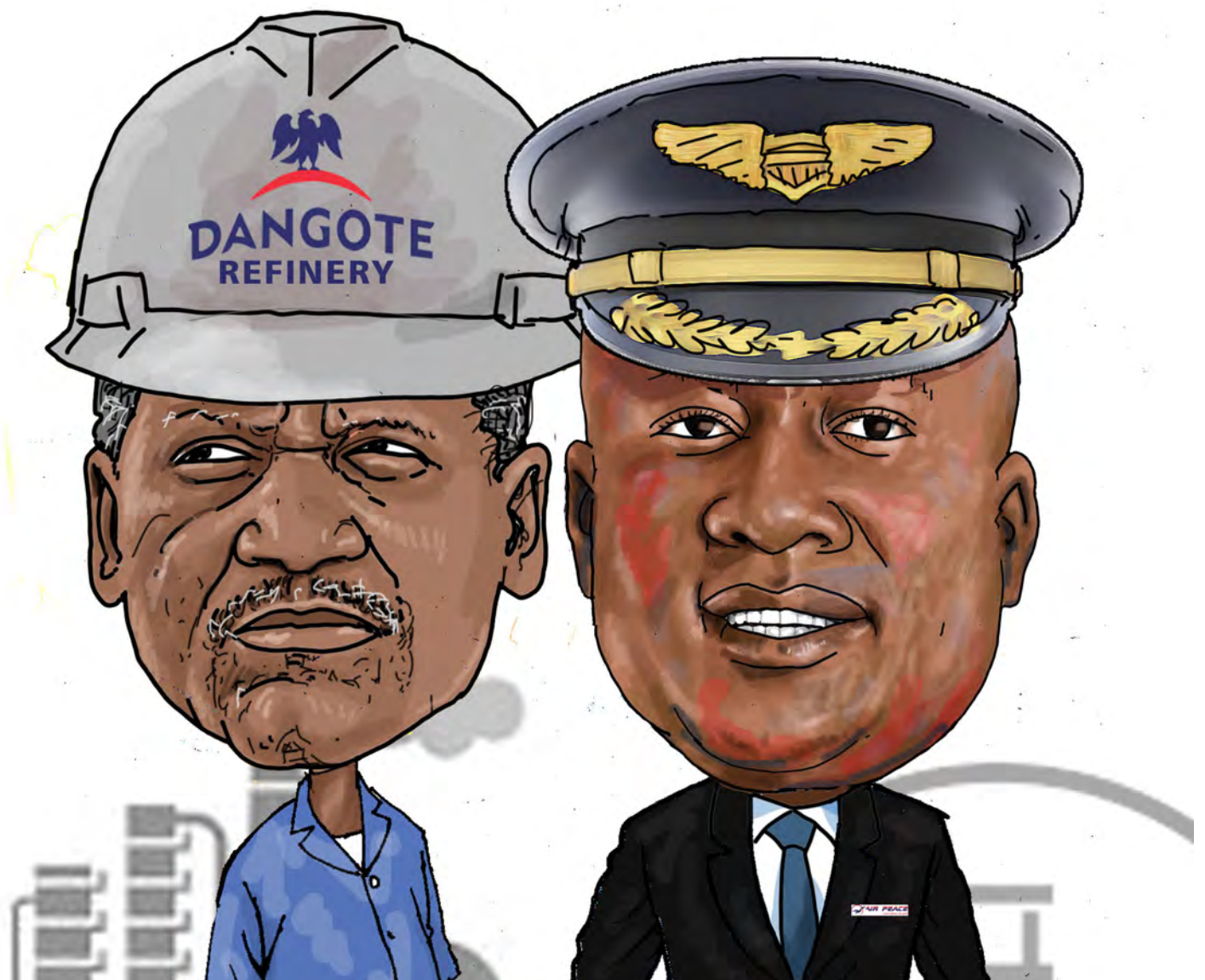


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Insecurity: Intelligence-led policing has yielded good results in Anambra - CP, Adeoye

- Says 'I put my feet down to sanitise Awkuzu police station'
- 'For every crime that happens, about 25 were averted'

ZEBULON AGOMUO

The Anambra State Commissioner of Police, Aderemi

Adeoye has said that the state command was intelligence-led, which according to him has been

responsible for the results being recorded in the state under his watch.

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Electricity tariff: Afenifere says power ministry, NERC forcing Nigerians to pay for their inefficiency

- Calls on states to establish power plants

INIOMBONG IWOK

The pan-Yoruba socio-cultural and political organisation, Afenifere, has decried the over 200 percent electricity tariff increase, saying that it will

thwart the current administration's effort at boosting the economy as businesses will shrink.

Afenifere, in a statement issued by its National Publicity

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News

Nigeria, South Africa's cooperation to stimulate bilateral relations, economic growth

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

The Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Economic, Trade and Investment has partnered with the South African High Commission in Abuja to organise a Diplomatic Business Rendezvous aimed at strengthening bilateral relations between both countries.

This event provided an excellent platform for business leaders to engage with government officials and diplomats, fostering stronger ties between nations and exploring opportunities for economic cooperation.

It also served as a platform for networking, sharing insights, airing challenges and discussing opportunities that benefit both countries' international trade and investment landscape.

Speaking at the Diplomatic Business Rendezvous in Abuja, Kingsley Obiukwu, group managing director of Bolton White Hotel, said the bilateral cooperation between Nigeria and South Africa could stimulate economic growth in various sectors for the benefit of both countries.

He said the cooperation between Nigeria and South



Africa can play a pivotal role in driving economic growth across the continent. He said this underscored the significance of fostering strong bilateral relations between the two economic powerhouses.

"Partnerships between Nigeria and South Africa could lead to mutually beneficial

collaborations across various sectors, stimulating economic growth and development in both countries.

"Our involvement in an event such as this demonstrates our commitment to advancing the interests of our industry and contributing to the broader economic land-

scape," he said. Citing recent initiatives aimed at strengthening ties between Nigeria and South Africa, Obiukwu commended efforts by both governments to enhance diplomatic relations and facilitate greater cooperation at the bilateral and regional levels.

He urged policymakers to

prioritise initiatives that promote trade liberalisation, remove barriers to investment, and streamline regulatory frameworks to create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive.

He reiterated his belief that Nigeria and South Africa hold the key to unlocking

Africa's economic potential through strategic cooperation and collaboration.

He called on leaders from both nations to seize the opportunity to work together towards a shared vision of prosperity, stability, and inclusive growth for the benefit of all African citizens.

Our attention on infrastructure, security is to attract investors for economic devt - Otti

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State has said that his administration's attention on infrastructure and security was to attract investors to drive of the state's economic development.

Otti stated this at the Government House, Umuahia when he received Lazarus Angbazo, managing director/ chief executive officer, Nigerian Infrastructure Corporation, and his team.

He said his administration was willing to collaborate with the Nigeria Infrastructure Corporation in some critical areas of the economy such as agriculture and power.

Otti promised that his administration would further engage with the team to see how to enhance power supply to all parts of the state.

The Abia governor disclosed that the state government was in discussion with Geometric Power on the possibility of transferring excess power from Aba to boost power supply in Umuahia and its environs, a discussion, which

he noted, was receiving positive attention.

"For me, governance is about partnership. You can only do so much in the confines of your area, be it the national or sub national. So, for us we feel we need to attract as many partners as possible. That's why we are deliberate in infrastructure, we know that when you secure the place and provide infrastructure, investors will come.

"We have productive land, the kind of land which speaks to agriculture. Times were in the past when governments relied 100 percent on agriculture.

"The area of agriculture is very critical to our strategy and we want to engage further on that, just like power. Just less than 40 megawatts coming from Geometric today to Aba has changed a lot of things. And if from what we hear, the second turbine is fully commissioned then you will be talking about 80 to 90 megawatts. So, the story will be changed. There are businesses that rely fully on power. So, it is very important we solve the problem of the power in the remaining eight Local Government Areas," he enthused.

Ikechukwu Monday, commissioner for Power and Energy, in his speech, noted that Abia was blessed with many potential while Aba was the industrial hub of the South East region.

He hinted that Abia State was working on how to increase power supply in the state and would like to partner with the corporation, adding that the state was interested in collaborating with many investors to give Abia people what they want.

Angbazo, earlier in his speech, said they were keen for partnership between Abia State and the corporation.

He explained that the Nigeria Infrastructure Corporation was a government-backed, privately-managed infrastructure vehicle to complement infrastructure in states, adding that their mandate covered power, energy transmission, agriculture and industrialization, among others.

He commended Otti for his leadership style and for bringing credibility to governance, and hinted that they were in the state to key into the government's plan for restoring Aba's leadership as an industrial hub.

Tinubu's assenting to Nigeria Student Loan Act will increase access to education - Ododo

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

Following President Bola Tinubu's assenting to the Nigeria Student Loan Act which establishes the Nigeria Education. loan Fund (NELFUND), Governor Ahmed Ododo said that it will improve the quality of education and increase access to education for millions of Nigerian youth population and children from disadvantaged social and economic background in the country.

According to a press statement signed by Ismaila Isah, the Special Adviser on Media and made available to Journalists in Lokoja on Thursday, Governor Ododo expressed delight that President Tinubu is placing premium on the provision of quality education to Nigerians, adding that education is a veritable tool for empowering the people and an enabler for more Nigerians to ascend the socio-economic ladder irrespective of their social and economic backgrounds.

Governor Ododo noted that by assenting to the Student Loan Act, President

Tinubu has further demonstrated uncommon determination to transform the education sector in Nigeria thereby providing the impetus for the acquisition of skills required to meet Nigeria's manpower needs in response to emerging realities of the development agenda of the country.

Governor Ododo equally commended the President for according high priority to the development of education in

Nigeria, noted that the Student Loan Act and its provisions are clear evidence that education is critical to the attainment of the Renewed Hope Agenda of the President, as he assured his administration's commitment to enhance access to quality education in Kogi State by expanding the scale of educational infrastructure and providing needed resources to skill up the youth population in the state.



Ahmed Ododo



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News

Ogun State upskills public servants for excellence

IFEOMA OKEKE
-KORIEOCHA

In a bid to optimize public service excellence, Africa Tech Hub Ltd, in collaboration with the Bureau of Establishments and Training, Office of the Head of Service, Ogun State, recently organized a two-day training program for officers on grade levels 12-14.

With a theme 'Optimizing Public Service Excellence,' the event commenced with a warm welcome address delivered by Lydia Fajounbo, Permanent Secretary of the Bureau of Establishments and Training, setting the stage for the enriching discussions ahead. Kolawole Fagbohun, Head of Service, Ogun State, followed suit with an opening address emphasizing the significance of the training in enhancing the capabilities of public service officers.

In his paper titled 'Unleashing Your Leadership Potential,' Meroyi Emmanuel Olayinka delved into practical leadership strategies, including the importance of influence, establishing credibility, engaging others, communicating passion, and leading by example.



He also delineated different levels of leadership, from positional authority to pinnacle respect, urging participants to continuously develop their interpersonal and communication skills to inspire others effectively.

Sean Olabode Badiru, CEO of Africa Tech Hub Ltd, facilitated the session on "Mastering Efficiency & Effectiveness." He conveyed the importance of efficiency and effectiveness in the realm of public service. "In the Ogun State Public Service, we strive to deliver the best possible service to our citizens," he emphasized. "To achieve this, both efficiency and effective-

ness are crucial."

Badiru elucidated various techniques for effective time management, stressing the significance of prioritization using tools like the Eisenhower Matrix.

He also delved into the realm of communication and collaboration, highlighting the importance of active listening and assertive communication in fostering teamwork and project success.

He said "The Eisenhower Matrix serves as a guiding beacon, aiding us in categorizing tasks based on their urgency and importance. By doing so, we can efficiently prioritize our efforts."

Moreover, Badiru shed light on the significance of streamlining workflows and processes, urging officers to identify and eliminate inefficiencies within their work areas. "Efficiency is key in our pursuit of excellence within the Ogun State Public Service," he affirmed. "By proposing solutions such as process simplification and technology utilization, we can enhance productivity and service delivery."

The session further explored the importance of documentation and leveraging technology and automation to streamline operations. He said "In our quest to leverage

technology and automation, we harness the power of internal workflow automation tools and general productivity aids. Through e-forms, document management systems, internal communication platforms, electronic signature solutions, data analytics platforms, knowledge management systems, collaboration tools, email management tools, project management software, and a plethora of other digital resources, we elevate our efficiency to unprecedented heights."

Badiru concluded his address by demonstrating the utilization of Google Workspace tools, providing practical insights into enhancing digital proficiency within the public service sector.

In a subsequent session on "Communication & Advocacy for Public Service," Badiru reiterated the pivotal role of public servants in building trust, fostering positive relationships, and delivering exceptional service to communities. "Advocacy transcends mere support for causes or policies; it embodies a commitment to improving service delivery, securing resources, building trust, and influencing policy de-

terminations. Every one of us, regardless of our rank or title, possesses the potential to be an advocate - a catalyst for positive change within our communities," he said.

He outlined strategies for effective advocacy, emphasizing the significance of leveraging communication channels and engaging in policy discussions to drive positive change.

He said "let us recognize the pivotal role of creating a welcoming and efficient experience for visitors within our departments. By fostering an environment characterized by warmth, efficiency, and accessibility, we not only enhance the government's reputation but also increase trust and cooperation between the public and the government. Positive impressions, enhanced reputation, efficiency building trust, citizen empowerment, relationship building, and increased job satisfaction are just a few of the benefits stemming from a welcoming environment. To achieve this, we must employ strategies such as warm greetings, proactive assistance, accessibility, clear communication channels, and a commitment to continuous improvement."

Insurance broker tasks Uzodinma on South East development

...Congratulates governor on appointment as APC coordinator in zone

SABY ELEMBA

The Managing Director and Chief Executive officer of Crown Insurance Brokers, Felix Amadi, has congratulated Governor Hope Uzodinma on his appointment as the coordinator of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the South East region, taking him on the development of the zone.

In statement he personally signed, Amadi said: "Your appointment to oversee the affairs of the party in South East is a confirmation of the perfect will of God and your leadership quality to oversee the affairs of men and women of high political standard that constitute the party structure in South East."

Amadi solicits the support all party members in the zone for Uzodinma, saying, "And it is time for all South East people from all wards, local government and state structures and all sub-groups of All Progressives Congress to rise up and support our God-ordained coordinator governor."

"It is clear that you have put in a lot of hard work and dedication to deserve your appointment as the coordinator of APC in South East.

"Your achievements in the last four years in Imo State is a testimony that the All Progressives Congress will continue to grow in leaps and bounds and attain more success under your watch in South East under a peaceful political environment for the party to grow in the region."

He further said: "Your Excellency, your appointment by the party and the massive support it has received since the announcement by the national Chairman, Abdulahi Umar Ganduje is a sign that you are the popular choice of the peace-loving people of the APC family in the South East."

"Indeed, your appointment and acceptance as the coordinator of the APC in South East is

divinely ordained; thus, the continuous growth of the party and her members are assured in a prosperous environment under your leadership. "I urged you to continue to build the APC in the region as the best party in the South East and in Nigeria as a whole for more sustainable developments in terms of rapid and mega economic development.

"As you are aware that the expectations of APC members in the region are high in the areas of security, women empowerment, youth development and peaceful political co-existence while praying to God to shower you with more grace and wisdom to deliver all your vision of the party in the region."



Uzodinma

Nigeria's diversity is a source of strength, innovation - Odjenima

TOMISIN FATOBA

A tinuke Odjenima, an expert has said that Nigeria's diversity is a source of strength and innovation that will reshape the country's narrative of national progress.

To this end, she noted that are organisation is set to hold a symposium to redefine key concepts of diversity, drivers of growth and development strategies within Nigeria.

"We are committed to creating a future where every Nigerian can thrive," Odjenima added.

She also stated that the symposium is a testament to the increasing recognition of the need for inclusive dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.

"By redefining the concepts of diversity, development, and the drivers of growth, the event aims to chart a new course for Nigeria, one that embraces the rich diversity of its people as a cornerstone of national prosperity.

"As Nigeria continues to navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the 'Redefining National Diversity, Drivers, and Development' symposium stands as a beacon of hope and a call to action for all Nigerians to come together for the betterment of the country," she explained.

Odjenima clarified that the FLOC Symposium is a platform for citizens to come together and engage in conversations that will shape the future of Nigeria.

"We are optimistic that the discussions at this year's edition will provide actionable steps towards the rapid development of our country."

Scheduled to take place in the vibrant heart of the nation, this event promises to be a landmark in the ongoing conversation about Nigeria's path to inclusive and sustainable development.

Titled 'Redefining National Diversity, Drivers, and Development,' the symposium seeks to address the complex challenges and opportunities that come with Nigeria's rich cultural tapestry.

With over 250 ethnic groups, the nation's diversity

is a profound asset that has the potential to fuel innovation and economic growth. However, leveraging this diversity to foster unity and drive development has been an enduring challenge.

The FLOC conference's upcoming symposium aims to tackle these issues head-on by bringing together thought leaders, policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders from various sectors. The goal is to create a dynamic platform for dialogue and exchange, where innovative solutions can be discussed and actionable strategies can be formulated.

Participants at the symposium will engage in panel discussions, keynote speeches, and networking sessions, exploring ways to harness Nigeria's diverse cultural, natural, and human resources.

The event is designed to spark conversations around economic prosperity, social cohesion, and national unity, laying the groundwork for a roadmap to inclusive development.

The FLOC Symposium seeks to equip citizens with the right orientation to take proactive steps towards nation-building and to encourage developmental conversations and re-orientation among citizens, ultimately generating actionable steps that will catalyze Nigeria's growth and prosperity.



Odjenima

Tractor revolution on the horizon as NDDC visits Bobtrack, home-made centre in Port Harcourt

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The long-dashed hope for tractorisation of farming in the Niger Delta may rise again.

This is because the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has paid a visit to the only tractor manufacturing outfit in the region, Bobtrack Tractors Limited.

Bobtrack exports to other African countries but is hardly given a look-in by state governments in the region.

Sources said some of the states that give them some attention are from the north. The Made-In-Port tractors are said to almost digital in operation by use of GPRS to calculate size of work and work done which it feeds to owners. It also plants and does fertilizers and other tasks such as harvesting.

Some samples taken to an exhibition in China were said to have sold out in minutes, but China stopped further importation from Nigeria.

BusinessDay gathered that countries like Kenya, Ghana, and Rwanda have since resorted to Bobtrack brand because it is designed for the African climate and survives in tropical climates and does what European and American tractors failed to do, plus guaranteed servicing.

These attributes seemed to have been however ignored over the years by state governments in the oil region, and the height of the neglect seemed to be when a state in the North imported over 1000 tractors from the US for a massive



The NDDC Executive Director of Projects, Sir Victor Antai (right), inspecting farming equipment at Bob Track Limited in Port Harcourt, with the Managing Director of Bob Track Limited, Ibifiri Bob Manuel (left), providing explanations.

mechanized farm scheme.

Now, the NDDC has paid a visit to the factory which is a stone throw and eventually announced plans to purchase modern farming equipment, such as tractors, to boost its agricultural initiatives, notably the Holistic Opportunities, Projects, and Engagement (HOPE) project. Speaking during a visit to inspect farming equipment at Bob Track Limited in Port Harcourt, NDDC's Executive Director of Projects, Victor Antai, emphasised the Commission's commitment to maximising the agricultural potential of the Niger Delta region and promoting the shift from traditional to mechanized farming practices. The Executive Director, who was accompanied by the NDDC Director, Agriculture and Fisheries, Winifred Madume, and the Director of Commercial

and Industrial Development, Godwin Nosiri, expressed satisfaction with the quality and capacity of the tractors and other farming tools. They noted that such equipment would boost the efforts to ensure food security in the Niger Delta region. Antai said: "The NDDC Management decided to look at various farming equipment to see how best we can incorporate them into the Project HOPE programme, which has agriculture as its key component. "The Project HOPE' initiative seeks to engage youths of the region by creating employment opportunities for them. We have collated the data of the youths in the region and many of them are interested in agriculture.

"The NDDC is resolute in the quest to provide food security in the Niger Delta region and we need to engage the

youths in agriculture to achieve this goal."

The resource person for Project HOPE, Ambassador Blessing Fubara, who also spoke during the inspection, underscored the need for a deliberate action to proffer sustainable solutions to engage the youth and speed up regional development.

He commended the NDDC for making efforts to ensure that the agricultural component of the project HOPE was mechanized.

Also speaking, the Managing Director of Bob Track Limited, Ibifiri Bob Manuel, observed that an agricultural revolution in Nigeria would be effective when it would be fully mechanised. He explained that the Bobtrack tractors were built specifically for Nigeria and the Niger Delta region in particular.

How AI reshapes industries, product development

...enhances creativity in manufacturing

SEYI JOHN SALAU

In the realm of digital transformation and technological innovation, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful force, reshaping industries and revolutionising traditional practices.

"From predictive analytics for demand forecasting to personalised recommendations for users, AI algorithms are powering a new era of efficiency and agility," Oluwaseyi Obadimeji, senior business analyst on money matters, said during a recent media parley in Lagos.

According to him, the integration of AI into product development processes has already yielded remarkable results across various sectors.

He said that top technology companies like Uber have been leveraging AI to enhance user experiences, optimize operations, and drive innovation.

Speaking to the future of AI and product development, Obadimeji said that with the advancements in machine learning, natural language processing, and computer vision, AI algorithms are poised to become even more sophisticated and adaptive.

According to him, evolution will not only streamline existing processes but also unlock novel avenues for innovation. "Product development, in particular, stands at the forefront of this transformation, as AI capabilities continue to evolve, promising unprecedented efficiencies and opportunities."

Obadimeji, who is also a certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP), in Product Management, Scrum, Lean Six Sigma, and Project Management, disclosed that as we delve into the intricate landscape of AI-driven prod-

uct development, it becomes imperative to understand its current impact and anticipate the future trajectory.

He said further that according to a Forbes recent report, AI AI-driven product development is projected to generate about \$15 trillion in economic value over the next decade.

"From autonomous vehicles to smart homes, AI-powered products will permeate every facet of our lives, redefining the way we interact with technology. Moreover, the democratization of AI tools and platforms will empower businesses of all sizes to harness its transformative potential," he said.

Speaking on upskilling for the AI revolution, he said that product managers, business analysts, and DevOps professionals must equip themselves with the necessary skills to thrive in an AI-driven ecosystem.

"Specialized training programs, such as AI for product management courses offered



Oluwaseyi Obadimeji

by Coursera offered by Pendo.io in collaboration with Google Cloud. Also AI For Business Specialization by Coursera and University of Pennsylvania, provide comprehensive insights into AI methodologies, algorithms, and applications in finance, marketing, people management and governance," he said.

Three Greensprings students named best in Nigeria for creating a phone app

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

Idara Attah, Imabong Apkan-Chinyere, and Mirabel Njoku are the three students of Greensprings School, who recently emerged as the overall best in Nigeria in the final stage of the Conrad Challenge.

They competed as Team Lavendaire and emerged as winners of the challenge for creating an innovative phone application and it earned them scholarships valued at \$894,000 and a cash prize of N1.500 million.

The app known as Juiceitup, uses an AI algorithm to recommend personalised juice-making ratios from various fruits to aid recovery of patients who are ill.

This performance represents the second consecutive time Greensprings School students have won the challenge.

In addition to Team Lavendaire's achievement, nine other teams from the school who made the finals were given a scholarship that amounted to \$6,400,000 with the first runner-up team of the competition, also from the school, gaining a cash prize of N1 million.

The accomplishment of these students follows just a year after another trio from Greensprings, Segun Balogun, Adewale Saliu, and David Onukwughu, attained the overall best-in-Nigeria position in the 2023 Conrad Challenge and represented Nigeria at the Global Conrad Summit at NASA's Johnson/Kennedy Space Center, USA.

Speaking on the outcome of the challenge, Afolabi Amusan, assistant principal of enhancement for the school, said the Greensprings School presented 10 teams of 35 students

who had qualified from the initial stages of the competition.

Amusan said that while Team Lavendaire clinched the

overall best-in-Nigeria award, some of the other teams won awards like first runner-up and best in Energy and Envi-

ronment which was received by Team Mono; best in Aviation and Aerospace by Team Kryptonite; and best in Cyber

Technology and Security won by Team Unit.

He said the school was mindful of its position as the national winner from 2023 and went into this year's challenge to defend the title, adding that this year's finalists took their performance a notch higher than the previous year. Amusan said in addition to their cash prize and scholarships, Team Lavendaire will represent Nigeria in the 2024 Conrad World Summit in April at The Space Center in Houston, USA.

According to him, other teams, such as Team Mono, the 1st runner-up received a cash prize of N1 million while each member of the nine finalist teams was awarded \$80,000 in Menlo College USA, \$60,000 in Lewis & Clark College USA, and \$60,000 in Clarkson University USA, making a total of \$6,400,000 worth of scholarships for the students.



Idara Attah, Imabong Apkan-Chinyere, and Mirabel Njoku, winners of the overall best in Nigeria at the Conrad Challenge.

News



Mayor of Brampton, Patrick Brown presents Key to the city of Brampton to His Majesty, Ogiame Atuwatse III CFR Olu of Warri

Mining: Alake restates commitment to implementation of 7-point agenda

RUTH TENE NATSA, Abuja

The Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake has expressed the commitment of the federal government to implement the administration's 7-Point Agenda, to reposition the sector.

The Minister restated his commitment during a site tour of the Segilola Resources Operating Limited (SROL), an indigenous gold mining company in Ilesha, Osun State, the Minister lauded the extensive work that had gone into the facility, expressing delight that over 95% of its staff are Nigerians, a statement by the Special Assistant on Media, to the Minister, Segun Tomori informed.

According to Alake who

stressed that his focus has been to redirect local and international attention to the mining sector, "I have made sanitising the security of mining environment one of the critical points of my 7-point agenda. Recently, as part of actualising that policy, I had to unveil the creation of a mine marshal. They have a base in all the states of the country".

"The implementation of the 7-point agenda is to reposition the mining sector," he added

Alake also restated his commitment to support mining companies that place a premium on local content in their operations

Emphasising the imperative of a harmonious relationship with host communities, Alake lauded SROL for overshooting its community development targets, urging mining companies across the country to follow

suit to ensure a safer, unfettered operating environment which will culminate in maximum beneficiation for both operators, the host communities and government.

He advised mining companies to emulate the international best practices of the Segilola gold project to develop the sector, further urging other operators to take a cue from them.

Commending the high Nigerian component of the project, Alake remarked that the firm had applied local content in its procurement and employment policies. He praised the company's tenacity of purpose and efficient methods deployed to push through with its vision, despite daunting challenges at inception.

In his remarks, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Segilola Resources, Segun Lawson stated that the company is a world-class project powered by Nigerians, appealing for support from the Federal Government to enable it to scale up and contribute better to the economy of the country.

Presenting the achievements of the company to the Minister, officials said the company operates an open pit system involving drilling and blasting, hauling and loading the rocks before processing into gold.

Last year, it produced 84,609 ounces (2,398.6 kilogrammes) of gold amounting to 194.4 million dollars at current prices.

They said the company spent N29 billion on local procurement and has a 1,993 workforce with 98 per cent local employees.

Aspirants get more days to apply for the \$200k She Sustains Accelerator programme

BRIGHT IMOHO

Female entrepreneurs in the green economy have additional time to take a chance at being part of the \$200,000 She Sustains Accelerator programme of the United States Agency for International Development and Amazon.

Project managers Clean Technology Hub announced on 29 March a shift of the closing date to 12 April in response to enquiries and a surge of interest.

Fifty-six female entrepreneurs will share the \$200,000 in grant aid offered to scale their businesses courtesy of the Climate Gender Equity Fund (CGEF) of the United States

Agency for International Development and Amazon.

Ifeoma Malo, Clean Technology Hub CEO and founder, stated: "The sheer volume of inquiries and applications we have received in the last week is truly inspiring. We are thrilled to extend the deadline to ensure all these talented women have the opportunity to join this transformative programme."

The She Sustains Accelerator Programme empowers women-led cleantech start-ups by providing them with the resources, mentorship, and industry connections needed to thrive.

It offers intensive workshops and training, mentorship from industry experts, access to funding and investment op-

portunities and networking.

In the workshops, participants will develop critical business skills in fundraising, marketing, and product development, and industry experts will mentor them.

They will also connect with potential investors, secure the capital needed to scale their businesses and build strong relationships with other female entrepreneurs and industry professionals.

Clean Technology Hub encourages interested persons to click the link <https://tinyurl.com/CTHSheSustains> and commence the process.

According to USAID, the Climate Gender Equity Fund "will increase access to climate finance for gender-responsive, women-led, and women-benefiting organisations that address climate change."

CGEF is one of the first major activities of USAID's Climate Finance for Development Accelerator (CFDA), a \$250 million initiative designed to mobilise \$2.5 billion in public and private climate investments by 2030 to fund a range of climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions focused on scaling up the transition to an equitable and resilient net-zero economy.

Launched with an initial commitment of \$6 million between USAID and Amazon, CGEF seeks to leverage at least \$60 million in capital from corporations, foundations, bi/multi-laterals, and other funders. CGEF will reach women climate leaders in global emerging markets where USAID operates (see additional detail below).



Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake, (l) and MD/CEO, Segilola Resources Operating Limited, Segun Lawson during the minister's site tour of Segilola Gold project in Osun State, recently.



LASCOPA advocates fair, responsible IT for consumers

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

The role of responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the daily lives of consumers in Nigeria and beyond was highlighted at a one-day conference and exhibition hosted by the Lagos State Consumer Protection Agency (LASCOPA).

The event came under the theme, 'Fair and responsible Artificial Intelligence for consumers.' It was part of LASCOPA's activities to mark the 2024 World Consumer Rights Day.

The General Manager of LASCOPA, Afolabi Solebo who spoke at the event, stressed the importance of fair and responsible AI in the day-to-day activities of consumers.

"We must advocate for fairness in these systems. Fairness entails unbiased algorithms that treat everyone equitably irrespective of their background, race, or socio-economic status."

For Afolabi, the importance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) cannot be overstated as it has revolutionised the way businesses engage with their clientele.

"Consumers are surround-



R-L: General Manager LASCOPA, Afolabi Solebo with others at the event.

ed by AI-driven technologies, from personalised recommendations to automated decision-making processes. In the rapidly advancing landscape of technology, the integration of Artificial Intelligence has become an integral part of our daily lives."

LASCOPA boss further explained that the current dispensation, the top AI talent market is diversifying and deepening as major manufacturing- Automotive adding, "health, defense, consultancy companies, banks and many others are reinventing themselves as AI-led technology organisations. The ability of these companies to attract and grow their top AI

talent is exponential."

He pointed out that responsible AI involves transparency and accountability, adding that consumers deserve to know how their data is being used and have the right to understand the decisions made by AI systems. "Developers and Companies must prioritise ethical considerations, ensuring that AI benefits the society as a whole.

For him, making Lagos a 21st Century economy, can only happen with a collective responsibility of every consumer, manufacturer, stakeholder and indeed the government in ensuring it contributes its quota in actualising this vision by embracing the principles of fair-

ness and accountability in order to build a more inclusive and sustainable future for AI.

Giving a brief background of the agency, the General Manager recalled that it was established as a result of the state government growing concern to ensure that consumers in the state do not only have a voice, but to also ensure the promotion and protection of consumer rights.

On her part, Group Executive Director for Strategic Commercial Operation, Dangote Industries, Fatima Aliko-Dangote, urged organisations to see consumers as kings and added that they should treat them as such.

Firm restates commitment to deepen financial inclusion for entrepreneurs in Africa

ANTHONY NLEBEM

The CEO of NoOnes, Ray Youssef, has reiterated the firm's dedication to advancing financial inclusion and entrepreneurship in Africa through its innovative financial communication app.

Utilizing a robust peer-to-peer marketplace, NoOnes offers an integrated solution to tackle diverse economic challenges and open up new avenues for wealth creation.

Youssef stressed the importance of bridging the Financial Inclusion Gap, noting, "Despite progress, a significant portion of Africa's population remains excluded from traditional banking services."

"NoOnes serves as a beacon of hope, leveraging the decentralized nature of cryptocurrencies to deliver comprehensive financial services accessible via smartphones. This approach democratizes financial access, bringing unprecedented convenience and efficiency to millions of Africans," he added.

Youssef also highlighted NoOnes' commitment to facilitating cross-border transactions, remittances and promoting financial literacy with various investment opportunities.

"Remittances play a vital role for many African families, yet traditional methods often come with high fees and slow processing times. NoOnes addresses these challenges by enabling swift, secure, and cost-effective cross-border transactions," he explained.

"The platform's peer-to-peer marketplace allows for direct fund transfers, bypassing traditional banking systems and ensuring quicker delivery of funds to recipients," Youssef continued.

Moreover, the app focuses on educating users about cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology, investing in education initiatives such as building schools in the global south. It also offers a range of investment opportunities to empower users to diversify their portfolios and improve their financial well-being.

Youssef emphasized that the app serves as both a financial platform and a launchpad for entrepreneurs and startups, with a priority on user security.

"We prioritize user safety through advanced security measures while maintaining transparency and integrity. Our motto, 'everyone eats,' reflects our commitment to providing equitable service," he stated.

Investors say mega comedy show sellout proves PH is back to business

...Nightlife lovers say insecurity has truly reduced

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The oversubscription of a mega comedy show on Easter Monday in Port Harcourt seems to signpost the new status of the Garden City as the entertainment hub of the Niger Delta. Others say it shows that, indeed, Port Harcourt is back to business. Investors such as the Mayor of Housing (My-ACE China) and Victor Tubo who attended the night show say entertainment industry is a hanging fruit for investments in Port Harcourt.

It was the annual 'Mayor of Pitakwa' show featuring the host, K.O Baba Jornsens, who was heavily supported by the Mayor of Housing, who is the CEO of the Housing and Construction Ltd, with some other sponsors.

The show took place at the newly built but biggest event place in the Niger Delta, the EUI Event Centre, on Abacha Road in the New GRA.

By 6pm, the road to the event centre was jampacked and by 8pm, the inside grounds were fully packed as the over 1,500 capacity tent-hall was full. The least ticket was N7,000.

The theme, 'They Like to Fool Us', indicated it was politically flavoured. Patrons of different age brackets and social strata trooped and slushed to the venue. The street was adorned with food vendors of all types.

Speaking on why investment in the entertainment industry is the right way to go in Port Harcourt, the Mayor of Housing, who is known as a real estate success strategist, described the show as a huge success because the hall was full to the brim. He said everybody was looking above the standard already. He described the show as a prime export from the

Niger Delta. Explaining what brought the Mayor of Pitakwa show to this mega point, China said it's because every year he (K.O Baba) ups his game and tries to compete with those shows that happen in Eko Hotel and those places in Lagos.

Entertainment industry:

The Mayor of Port Harcourt said PH has been very ready for the entertainment industry, but this year's event benchmarked Port Harcourt as more resilient than other places. He said: This is because what you see he is doing is on the back of very little support. The dichotomy between Lagos and Port Harcourt is mainly sponsorship. Many of the entertainers here have the talent but lack the commensurate sponsorship others have in Lagos because Lagos has already crossed a threshold where commerce and art meet.

"Companies in Nigeria that have branches in Port Harcourt will rather budget for sponsorship of arts in Lagos and nothing for Port Harcourt. So, this has benchmarked how far one can go on personal resilience and little support."

Challenge:

The Mayor of Housing appealed to corporate bodies and governments to make haste and join in promoting art in the Niger Delta and PH before it's too late. "You can see that brands such as Trophy and the rest are coming in because they are be-

ginning to see value above sea level. It's actually a dying minute for any sponsor to come in before it becomes too expensive for them to compete."

On what gains he expected from collaborating in the 'Mayor of Pitakwa' in the annual comedy project with K.O Baba, the Mayor of Housing talked of two things; brand visibility and brand export. "I tell people, being known without selling is empty, selling without being known lacks a future. So, for a business, you like to sell for immediate income, you like to be known for future income. So, the first thing for my brand is partnering with the biggest comedy show in the Niger Delta, the more people know the Mayor of Housing, the more they will buy when they are ready to buy."

For export, he said those that support growing artistes gain when those artistes hit success because the stars won't forget their early sponsors. "There is a lot of value in the entertainment space; and more than entertainment is people. People are more important than money because people make money, money does not make people. So, instead of doing all to get the money, do all to get the people."

Speaking later after the event, K.O Baba, who thanked the likes of the Mayor of Hous-

ing, Budweiser, and Trophy, described the event as very successful.

"The success was in all ramifications. Attendance was massive, content was very good, and the organization was world class. Many have said that is how it should be. If we must say the truth, a lot of things we didn't envisage happened."

Looking ahead, he stated, "We want to begin to do satellite broadcast so other cities can watch the annual show. We want to give it global appeal. It attracted many persons from outside Port Harcourt. That is what tourism is; airport pick-up, hotels, etc." Some of the patrons and night lovers at the event who spoke with the press said insecurity has come down much.

David Ogwuzerem and his wife said night life is needed in Port Harcourt because people are suffering and need where to ease off. "It's a holiday, one needs to catch fun, have some relaxation and feel the impact of the holiday."

He admitted that Port Harcourt use to be the hub of entertainment and fun but militancy and cultism affected it, and Lagos took over the industry. He also said that: "But in the last few years there have been efforts to reintroduce entertainment."

I appeal to the government to give their full support to the creative artists.



Mayor of Housing and many more PH bigshots return to nightlife at Mayor of Pitakwa Comedy event.

City File

Plateau Police nabs 44, exposes fake Army captain among suspects

NATHANIEL GBAORON, Jos

Police in Plateau State have arrested and paraded 44 suspects, including an individual posing as a Nigerian Army captain.

While briefing journalists on Friday in Jos, the Plateau State Commissioner of Police Hassan Yabanet said the police will continue to do its best to eradicate crime.

The CP said Shedrack Sabo reported to the SWAT Unit that Lucky Okoh had shown him a military identity card, claiming to be a captain, and persuaded him to pay N110,000 for a job.

According to the CP, he was subsequently arrested, and items including a military



identity card, three Nigerian army recruitment forms, and one NSCDC recruitment form were recovered from his residence.

The CP disclosed that one suspect confessed to snatching 22 Boxer motorcycles between Plateau and Bauchi States and was apprehended in Bauchi.

He further said two of the suspects were female and were arrested for kidnapping, while the majority were involved in kidnapping, rape, and robbery cases.

Recovered items according to the CP included a white Boxer Bus, a motorcycle, and electrical installations cables.

Yabanet expressed gratitude for the public's assistance in providing tips leading to the suspects' arrests and appealed

for continued support.

"On 04/03/2024 at about 02:30pm, one Shedrack Sabo 'm' of ATM quarters, Bukuru reported at the SWAT Unit that on 16/02/2024 at about 04:30pm, one Lucky Okoh male, showed him a military identity card and introduced himself as a captain in the military."

"He further convinced him to pay the sum of N110,000.00 to secure him a job. The suspect, one Lucky Okoh male, of Guratopp was arrested by SWAT operatives on 04/03/2024 at about 03:00pm. After a thorough search was conducted on his house, one military identity card, three Nigerian army recruitment forms and one NSCDC recruitment form were recovered. Investigation is ongoing."

Eid-ul-Fitri: Security expert sues for surveillance, adequate security

BY SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

All members of the Joint Communities Security Watch for Kwara South District have been charged to intensify surveillance patrols in their respective domains to ward off any type of crime, especially kidnaping and armed robbery.

A statement signed by Olaitan Oyin-Zubair, the

Coordinator of the local security outfit, on Friday maintained that members of the group are a reliable integral part of the security architecture working with official uniformed security agencies protecting lives and property in the zone.

"Having therefore, been recognised as such, it behoves the group members to work relentlessly to justify the confidence reposed in them both by the public and

government at all levels," it added. The coordinator also enjoined group members to make sallah holiday free of crime in their domains by mounting road and in-house surveillance against men of the underworld.

He charged members as security volunteers to work closely with the Police and other security operatives during the discharge of their duties, stressing that any crime detected should be reported to

appropriate authorities.

Oyin-Zubair, however, warned that the organisation will not condone members' overzealousness and or taking laws into their hands when treating suspects of any crimes, just as he cautioned travellers to avoid night journeys especially during the Sallah holidays.

He assured all and sundry of maximum security which will be free of causality like the last Christmas and Easter Holidays in the zone.

Gunmen invade Agojeju-Odo community, kill 19 people, set houses ablaze

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

Agojeju-Odo community in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State has been attacked by unknown gunmen and killed 19 people while many houses were set ablaze.

Police Public Relation Officer, William Aya who confirmed the incident said that the yet to be identified gunmen attacked Agojeju -- Odo community in Omala local government area on Thursday, noting that the Divisional Police Office of the local government informed him that 19 people were killed while some sustained injuries in the attack.

He stated that the Commissioner of Police

Kogi State Police Command, CP Bethrand Onuoha has deployed more policemen to the communities, assuring that the perpetrators of the heinous act will be apprehended.

The locals said, the gunmen

attacked sleepy town of Agojeju Odo in Omala local government area where men were killed and farm produce destroyed. The community has appealed to Kogi state governor Usman Ododo and

Security Agencies to come to their aid by deploying more security personnel to the area, as the police in the Local Government Council have been overwhelmed and overpowered by the attackers.



Kogi raises 7-man committee to monitor revenue in the state

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

Kogi State House of Assembly has set up a new seven-man committee that would ascertain the total revenues accruing to the state government.

Aliyu Umar Yusuf, the Speaker disclosed this during plenary sitting on Thursday, this is coming under the heels of the inability of the precious committee to deliver on its mandate.

Yusuf explained that it was imperative to get correct data on the total revenue that accrues to the state, stressing that this would help in a long way in the rapid infrastructural and human developments of the state.

He said the terms of reference of the committee would be given them and directed members to submit report in the next eight weeks.

According to the Speaker, the Chairman of the Committee is Olawumi Jacob of Mopamuro state constituency while Akus Lawal of Ankpa 1 state constituency is co-chairman.

Other members of the committee are Idrees Maikudi of Kogi state constituency, Jibrin Abu of Ajaokuta state constituency, Abdurasaq Suleiman of Okene Town state constituency and Emmanuel Obaro of Yagba East state constituency while Muhammed Bello Abdul is the Committee Clerk, according to the Speaker.

NewsFeature

Third Mainland Bridge: Not yet celebration time despite full reopening

CHUKA UROKO

Last Thursday, respite came the way of motorists who use the Third Mainland Bridge, Lagos for their daily commute to either work or business.

That was the day the Federal Government reopened the bridge which had been in partial closure for three months. But concerns remain.

David Umahi, minister of Works, declared the bridge open in a brief, brisk but momentous occasion that saw elated motorists speed through the bridge as a demonstration of freedom from months of glitch and gridlock on the bridge and all the adjoining routes in or out of Lagos Island.

The minister, who was represented by the Federal Controller of Works in Lagos, Olukorede Kesha, expressed gratitude to Lagosians for their patience during the period of the extensive repairs of the bridge.

While the minister revealed that other ancillary works like the installation of speed limits, guard rails, and CCTV, among others will end by May 24, Kesha advised road users to take ownership of the infrastructure and protect every installation on it.

Motorists, who had been having harrowing driving experience on the bridge, described its reopening as a significant milestone that benefits everybody in terms of man-hour lost on the bridge and the socio-economic impact.

One of the motorists who spoke to our reporter a few minutes before the bridge was reopened said, "I live in Ketu and work on the Island. This bridge is my route any day. But it was not easy these past three months plus. I spent upwards of four hours to commute to work



for a journey that ordinarily should not take one two hours."

The motorist, who identified himself simply as Kelvin, noted that apart from the man-hour lost every day on the bridge, there was also the aspect of stress on both the human body and the vehicle plus the extra money spent on fuel and, in some cases, business appointments missed.

Another motorist, a commercial bus driver who identified himself as Wasii Akintoye, said he goes to CMS and Obalende from Oshodi on daily basis.

"It was really a difficult time but I pitied my passengers more because they paid for the time lost on the bridge. I charged them more," he said.

According to him, "Before the closure of the bridge, we were

charging like N700-N800 to Obalende, but we have to increase it to N1,200 and N1,500 depending on the period of the day. Some of my colleagues changed route but I continued but, 'I no lie you,' it was tough."

The Lagos State Commissioner for Transportation, Oluwaseun Osiyemi, who represented the state Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, at the reopening event, cautioned motorists against over-speeding as there are speed cameras that would capture them with appropriate fines.

Osiyemi commended the Federal Government for the project which, according to him, is a total renewal of one of the most important bridges in Nigeria.

The Third Mainland Bridge is the longest of three bridges connect-

ing Lagos Island to the mainland. The others are the Eko and Carter bridges. It was the longest bridge in Africa until 1996 when the 6th October Bridge in Cairo was completed.

It is reported that the Federal Government has spent about N15.6 billion carrying out repair works on the bridge in the last six years and yet they are not done which is why it is not yet time to clap with two hands over the Thursday, April 4 reopening of the bridge.

The bridge has undergone several repairs and rehabilitation which experts have blamed on the failure of the Federal Government and its relevant agencies to keep to rehabilitation and maintenance schedule on the bridge which is about 34 years old now.

The latest rehabilitation efforts

on the bridge for which the Federal Government is said to have spent about N6.28 billion involved the re-surfacing of the entire 11.8-kilometre length of bridge, the interchanges, the ramps, critical links, among others.

With all these, the Federal Government says it is not yet done with the bridge as it announced recently that a N46 billion contract has been awarded to Julius Berger for the rehabilitation of the bridge alongside Carter Bridge—the First Mainland Bridge in Lagos.

The minister of works who disclosed this during a tour of Federal Government's projects in Lagos recently, said the contract was for repairing the underwater damage of the bridge which, he said, would cost about N21 billion, while that of Carter Bridge is to gulp N25 billion.

"Already, Julius Berger is working on it, and has been mobilised with the sum of N6 billion and N7 billion respectively," he said.

The minister added that there were three critical underwater challenges affecting the structures one of which is the depletion of the slabs which, he said, there was nothing to worry about because the ministry is going to repair it as it did with Eko Bridge.

The other challenges are the deterioration of the pipe caps and their cover, among others. The cause of these challenges, he said, are illegal sand mining, underwater currents and rusting of the steel casings.

Because of these challenges and more, Umahi, asked the Federal Government to declare a state of emergency on these critical infrastructure, pointing out that it will cost over N6 trillion to construct another Third Mainland Bridge if, in the event of delay, the present bridge collapses.

"It is very likely in the face of these pending repairs that a day will come when motorists will be advised to plan their movement because the bridge will be closed to enable contractors carry out the repair work," Johnson Chukwuma, a structural engineer, reasoned.

Reminded that the minister has assured that the repair works would not disrupt traffic flow on the bridge, Chukwuma said it is possible to carry out such underway repairs while traffic is allowed on the bridge.

"But we are talking about technical engineering work like bridge repair. We may have a critical point where the bridge should not have any load on it, no matter how little, to enable the contractor do his work without any disturbance whatsoever," he explained.

"So, the bridge has been fully opened, we welcome that; but it does not foreclose the need for closure in future since the rehabilitation of that critical infrastructure is work in progress until it is fully done," Chukwuma said.



One of the motorists who spoke to our reporter a few minutes before the bridge was reopened said, "I live in Ketu and work on the Island. This bridge is my route any day. But it was not easy these past three months plus. I spent upwards of four hours to commute to work for a journey that ordinarily should not take one two hours"

State of the nation

Nigerians 'sidon dey look' as Tinubu throttles on reforms

SEYI JOHN SALAU

Nigerians are divided in their responses to the reforms being embarked upon by the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration.

While some are watching to see what the reforms would amount to, some are neither here nor there in their understanding of what is happening, and a few are optimistic that the administration is on the right track.

The administration has embarked on a number of reforms such as the petrol subsidy removal, floating of the Naira, unified foreign exchange (fx) market, among others since Tinubu assumed office on May 29, 2023.

This was in relation to his pre-election campaign promises, where he said he would "hit the ground running" if elected president.

And, true to his promise, the President has been steadfast with his campaign promises of reforming the economy to the point of asking Nigerians not to pity him, because he asked for the job.

"I have no reason to underperform as the elected president of the country because I campaigned for the job. I cannot complain about the job. I appreciate the gesture, and what you have told me this evening is very inspiring," Tinubu said in a recent meeting with the business community in Abuja.

The President announced two major economic reforms in his inaugural speech with that historic statement – "oil subsidy is gone" and the unification of the naira's multiple exchange rates. Over the years, petrol subsidy payment has strained Nigeria's public accounts, with the several governments, before the current administration, paying huge sums of money for oil subsidies.

For many economists and analysts, removing oil subsidies should free up public resources for allocation to growth and economic recovery. However, like every other aspect of the Nigerian society; oil subsidy removal has failed to plug holes in government spending.

While the government has argued about increased revenue to the federal and the federating states since the May 29 announcement, Nigerians have had to struggle with the resultant effect of the high-cost-of-living, which raised petrol price by 200 percent, moving from about N198/litre to about N600/litre or more depending on the location.

According to some analysts, the reforms are needed to set the



President Tinubu

country on the path of growth and economic recovery; however, there are economic implications to the reforms, which the World Bank has warned could push seven million more Nigerians into poverty.

It is also believed that the recalculations based on the new rates will increase Nigeria's external debt, import duties, increase transport cost, consumer goods costs and energy and electricity tariffs (which happened last week for consumers

Most Nigerians are not happy based on the situation we found ourselves in today. But the truth remains that president Tinubu did a lot as governor of Lagos state. The problem is that someone might have good intentions but the people around him might be the problem

on the Band A category).

According to the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), reforms are not meant to plunge the citizens further into poverty or violate the rule of law. The ISS opined that while Tinubu's reforms are a step forward in the economic trajectory of the country, there are however, deep structural issues to be addressed before Nigeria's economy can deliver prosperity for Nigerians.

However, the president has

promised to turn things around for the better in his recent meeting with business leaders during the breaking of fast at Iftar in Abuja Thursday last week. He further assured the business community that Nigeria's economy was at a turning point and would require the steadfast support of the private sector for sustained growth and prosperity.

"There is no driver of the economy that is bigger than the private sector. If the private sector

is not flourishing, there is no growth, no prosperity, no employment or development. No matter how flowery the speeches are, not even a mushroom will grow," Tinubu said.

However, the circumstances under which he came to power seem to be having a pull-down effect on his various reforms. According to some Nigerians, it is believed that President Tinubu got to the presidency in a controversial manner; on the back of the fact that he got a paltry 8,794,726 votes in the 2023 presidential election in a country with over 200 million people.

And because of the limited level of support he got from the last general election, it is believed in some quarters that his reforms might not appear popular to the generality of Nigerians, especially those that did not vote for the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in the 2023 general election.

It is also believed that what the people are waiting for is a big bang from the Tinubu administration; something that can waoh the people to give the reform some chance of bringing about the renewed hope the president promised prior to the election.

Also, it is said that if the Naira can come down to N700 per dollar, or if the administration goes ahead to checkmate food inflation and food prices crash, Nigerians would begin to listen to him and might be excited by the reforms put in place to put the country back on the path of economic recovery.

However, the State House in a February 22, 2024, publication insisted

that there was no going back on the reforms embarked upon by the Tinubu administration, and that the Federal Government remained steadfast in creating investment opportunities while tackling poverty.

"We are challenged, and we believe we will overcome the challenges. I have a can-do attitude that must be translated into a must-do attitude. We have a good team, and we must remain focused to get the goal accomplished," Tinubu said while receiving a delegation from the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) in Abuja.

The president further reaffirmed his commitment to creating an enabling environment for business to thrive, emphasising that his administration's focus on investing in key sectors, such as agriculture, solid minerals, energy, health, physical infrastructure, trade promotion, financial services, digital enterprise, and the creative economy is underpinned by the need to ensure the welfare and prosperity of citizens.

"We are going to do more on security and investing in education, as we believe that education is the greatest weapon against poverty," he assured the delegation and called for collaboration to strengthen the partnership between the government and professional membership organisation towards achieving shared goals.

However, some Public Relations (PR) professionals believe the administration might have to rebrand its communication message and public engagement with Nigerians to make them embrace the various reforms of

the administration.

Accordingly, it is believed that more emphasis should be placed on amplifying the positive impact of the reforms on the lives of ordinary Nigerians. Also, it is said that the communication handlers of the administration should involve showcasing their success stories if any, using statistics to demonstrate improvement in key areas, and testimonials from beneficiaries.

"The government should adopt a transparent communication strategy, ensuring that citizens are informed about the reforms, their objectives, and the progress made so far," Omotoyosi Ajayi, a Public Relations (PR) consultant, said. According to her, this could include regular updates through press releases, official statements, and town hall meetings.

Ajayi said that there was also a place for stakeholder engagement in making the people excited about the ongoing reforms. "The government should actively engage with various stakeholders, including civil society organisations, business leaders, community representatives, and opposition parties. Solicit feedback, address concerns, and involve them in the reform process to foster a sense of ownership and collaboration," she said.

She also believes that this is the year to listen more to the people. Hence, the government should establish channels for continuous feedback and dialogue with the

public.

"This could be through online platforms, public consultations, or dedicated hotlines where citizens can voice their opinions and suggestions," Ajayi said.

Another PR professional however, said the timing of the reforms was not appropriate.

"People would expect that the factors that will make life easier after the increase of the fuel pump price and the free-market forces that will determine foreign exchange were not put in place immediately," Irantola Olutayo, Public Relations consultant, told BusinessDay SUNDAY.

According to him, it has got to a stage when people insinuate that all International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies are implemented hook, line and sinker without taking into consideration the peculiarities of Nigeria.

"As such, the agony in the land has dampened the heart of the masses. In PR, we endeavour to ensure that we are sensitive to our target audiences before deploying a programme," he said.

He further said that Nigerians do not feel excited by the various reforms because the government is not walking the talk; hence, there is a disconnect between what the government is saying, and action being taken.

"The government is not walking the talk and people can identify it easily," he said.

According to Olutayo, the

appointments of the Tinubu administration are on the high side despite the government's promise to implement the Oronsaye report.

"It is a sharp contrast. People want to see other things from within the government circles other than the reduction in the number of people that travel with government appointees," the PR consultant said.

He suggested that the government should adopt a proactive, transparent, and inclusive approach to nation building, leveraging genuine communications.

Olutayo said that the focus should be on highlighting achievements, engaging stakeholders, and addressing public concerns effectively.

According to him, by listening to the pulse of the people and demonstrating genuine responsiveness, the government can rebuild trust and garner support for President Tinubu's reforms.

Speaking from a religious perspective to why Nigerians appear unexcited about the economic reforms of the Tinubu's administration, Chidi Anthony, a Lagos-based cleric told BusinessDay SUNDAY that Nigerians should stop the blame game and focus on collective action to get the country out of the hoods.

He said that the economic hardship occasioned by the various reforms of government made the reforms unpopular with the masses. According to him, the president is trying but his best is not good enough

when compared to the current hardship across the country. "The president needs to do more; but, he needs to watch people around him."

According to him, Nigerians have lost hope in the country and that the president has not done enough to alleviate their sufferings. "What Nigerians expected is more than what we are seeing. Thank God gradually the Dollar is coming down; nobody believed the Dollar will come down to what it is today. A lot of people have said it is going to cross the N2000 mark.

"Most Nigerians are not happy based on the situation we found ourselves in today. But the truth remains that president Tinubu did a lot as governor of Lagos state. The problem is that someone might have good intentions but the people around him might be the problem," Anthony said.

A Lagos-based media professional told BusinessDay SUNDAY that the president has failed on his campaign promises to the people. According to him, Tinubu who has been touted as a revenue generator guru has only brought more suffering through his aggressive ways of revenue generation that do not benefit the common man and low-salary earners.

"Even if the blind cannot see that President Bola Tinubu has failed to deliver his Renewed Hope campaign promises, at least, he will feel it and can even tell a man like Muhammadu Buhari that someone is really performing woefully than him and give him a medal," Niola Daniels, said on his official handle @unlimitedeniola on X and Instagram.

Daniels also opined that the hike in tariff across different sectors of the economy makes it difficult for Nigerians to be excited with the administration's reforms.

"Who benefits from the increase in Customs duty? I need to be convinced that Nigerians are happy with the increase in tariffs and hike in electricity charges. Tinubu has not impressed the common man, and those who voted for him, he has failed to lead by example with the way he wastes public funds on unnecessary globe-throating and having his children flock around him as if they are officials of the government," Daniels said.

According to him, the president has also failed in the area of ensuring the security of lives and property.

He further said that the president's reforms have been slow in bringing the needed economic revival, and has equally not done enough to encourage investors into believing that Nigeria is open for business nor boost their confidence about the country's readiness for business.



Politics

NLC threatens to shut down economy as Tinubu's government insists on electricity tariff hike

INIOBONG IWOK

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) has threatened to shut down the economy as Federal Government under President Bola Ahmed insisted on the 240 per cent hike in tariff payable by power consumers in the band 'A' category despite calls for its reversal.

The government announced the hike in electricity tariff at a press briefing in Abuja by NERC, adding that those affected would pay N225 per kilowatt-hour, up from the previous rate of N68/kWh, representing about 240 per cent increase.

The government stated that the decision took effect on April 3, 2024.

The development means subsidy on electricity was withdrawn completely from the tariff of consumers on the band A category, which constitute about 15 per cent of the total 12.82 million power consumers across the country.

It also revealed that the subsidised power pricing regime would be for the short term, with a transition plan to achieve a full cost-reflective tariff within three years.

However, the decision did not go down well with the Nigeria Labour Congress, which told the Federal Government to prepare for the consequences of the tariff hike, which it described as wicked and unpopular, stressing that since the government preferred to lis-



ten to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, it should be ready to face the consequences.

An NLC official told journalists over the weekend that the new tariff was insensitive and does not justify the current hardship in the country presently.

Also Benson Upah, NLC's head of Information said the government should be prepared for the consequences of the tariff hike.

According to Upah "We did say earlier that this tariff hike is insensitive and unpopular. So if the government elects to continue with the hike or persists

in something that is evil, I'm sure it is equally prepared for the consequences of that evil.

"The manufacturers are saying this is going to hurt businesses and make the environment more hostile, and we also said so. There is no place in the world where high power tariffs have supported manufacturing. Not even in the developed world.

"So, it completely beats our imagination for the minister to have the audacity to say that the policy would continue. What this means is that the minister and the President are not in charge. It is saddening that the minister elected to pursue an unpopular policy."

Upah added, "It shows that the minister and the President are not in charge. The people in charge are the World Bank and the IMF. They are the ones driving this highly injurious policy.

"So, our leaders should be prepared for the consequences of this highly injurious policy. That is what I'll say about this issue for now."

Similarly, the 2023 presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar, has warned the Federal Government that Nigerians will suffer more with an increase in electricity tariffs.

Atiku said in a statement he personally signed on Friday that the increase in electricity tariffs would exacerbate the citizens' hardships, particularly as inflationary pressures were on the rise.

He admonished the Federal Government, particularly NERC, to under-

stand the root cause of inefficiencies in the power sector before implementing another round of reforms.

The statement read in part "As usual, the government is unleashing another dose of reforms without adequate notice and without an adequate post-reform plan to mitigate the pain.

"The increase in electricity tariff comes at a time when Nigerian citizens are going through excruciating difficulties occasioned by the withdrawal of subsidy on PMS and floating of the domestic currency.

"The government has not successfully dealt with the pains associated with the implementation of those measures, and now this. The hike in electricity tariff will create more difficulties for the citizens as inflationary pressures are elevated. Our manufacturing sector will similarly be impacted negatively.

"Not only are they paying higher interest rates on their bank loans, but also paying more for diesel, and paying higher wages as a result of the new minimum wage. The President's men are pushing the economy into a deeper crisis. His reforms are without a human face.

"It is important that we understand the root cause of the inefficiencies in the power sector before unleashing another dose of reforms. It is time to revisit the privatisation exercise that produced the Discos.

"Tinubu must (a) ensure that these reforms are sequenced, (b) implement measures to mitigate the pain, and (c) hold the NERC responsible for ensuring improved service delivery."

LP stakeholders in Adamawa pass vote-of-no-confidence on state chairman

HAPPY ZAROKADA, Yola

Eighteen (18) out of twenty one (21) LG chairmen of Labour Party (LP) in Adamawa have passed a vote of no confidence in the state Chairman, Christopher Nicholas.

This was made know in a press conference shortly after a meeting held behind closed doors, the LG chairmen issued a memo stating their grievances with the leadership of the Chairman.

They said the memo would also be copied to the Board of Trustees and the Abuja national headquarters, the Adamawa State security Chiefs to include the Commissioner of Police, the INEC, the Director Department of State Security Service, the Commander Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, NLC, TUC Stakeholders Forum of the Labour Party and IPAC.

They accused Nicholas of anti-party activities from 2022 to date.

Following the meeting's resolutions, the LG chairmen accused Nicholas of mismanaging funds, which according to them he converted the funds meant for party's activities into his personal use.

He's also a carrier of two membership cards of political parties (Accord Party and LP), engaging in anti-party activities.

They alleged that Nicholas printed fake forms that were unauthorized by the national and were supposed to be free for those willing to join the party, but illegally printed in thousands and sold them without proper accounting.

The LG Chairmen frowned at him for lack of good communication and interpersonal skills suppose of a good leader for a Chairman of a respected party like LP.

"Mr. Christopher Nicholas cannot communicate effectively and coherently during meetings, since his

appointment to the office of Chairman of Labour Party in Adamawa State. This has led to many internal squabbles within the executives. As a result, many founding EXCOs of the party in the state were forced to leave the party. Further demonstrating his inability to carry all party members along.

"Christopher Nicholas has shown himself to be above the party's constitution. This has been displayed by several decisions he has taken which were independent of the provision of our party's constitution nor the consent of the relevant stakeholders of the party.

"In the 2023 General Elections, Christopher Nicholas and his Executives were unable to coordinate the deployment of Party Agents. This resulted in the Labour Party not having agents to mount hundreds of polling units across many constituencies in the state during both Presidential and gubernatorial elections.

"Christopher Nicholas made

himself be easily bought over with money, which led to the party producing a Governorship candidate that lacked popularity with the masses. We refer to the case of Alh. Mustapha Madawaki Otumba the Governorship candidate in the 2023 General election," the letter read

According to them, they used the party's constitution, article 18 to get state officials to get caretaker committee on action capacity relying on the appropriate action of the National Working Committee (NWC)

The new caretaker committees are:

Hon. Theman Jonah (Chairman), Apwanokona Azmaveth (Secretary), Aliyu Mohammed Abubakar (Treasurer), Henry Ibrahim Kwataden (PRO), Hajija Zainab Isah Ahmed (Woman Leader), Kamalluddeen Jibrillah Aliyu (Youth Leader) and Auwal Yahaya Chiro-ma.

"This will be in the interest of the

party members and the Constitution of the Labour Party," they said.

You would recall before now that Nicholas had been facing party battles since the beginning of the 2023 election.

Reacting to the outcome of the meeting, a fraction of the party claimed not to be aware of the meeting, which they said came to them as a surprise.

Speaking to the press, Ezra Vandi Kwaya, the state organising secretary said the party has been peaceful and running smoothly.

"The state office have no issues or crisis, no challenge, there was no letter also issued to the chairman, no petition to that effect, there are many mischief makers that wants to hijack the party, somebody is behind this mischief and sponsoring it," Kwaya said.

He maintained that Christopher Nicholas remains the state Chairman, until they receive letter from the national secretariat.

Politics

Eminent Nigerians identify, proffer solutions to nation's challenges

INIOMBONG IWOK

In the last few decades, Nigeria has been bedevilled by ceaseless run of seemingly intractable challenges. Over the years, experts have listed several reasons as responsible for the country's stunted socio-economic and political growth.

Many believe that the problems lie with Nigeria's leaders, past and present. Some others have also canvassed that the citizens need to have attitudinal change.

As such, on Tuesday, April 2, some eminent Nigerians and some political stakeholders converged on the Trinity Church in Victoria Island, Lagos to discuss the state of the nation and proffer solutions to the challenges plaguing Nigeria.

The event was the fourth Nigerian Leadership Colloquium in celebration of Ituah Ighodalo's 63rd birthday. The colloquium had the theme 'Mistakes Nigeria Made.'

It was a day of celebration as the hall was full to the brim comprising Nigerians from all walks of life and ages; especially the youth, and members of the Trinity Church. Many friends of Ighodalo, the celebrant, were also there to honour him.

The event, chaired by Ike Nwachukwu, a retired general and former minister of Foreign Affairs, had Reuben Abati and Professor Olubukola Oyawoye as discussants.

Delivering his keynote speech, Atedo Peterside, Founder of Anap Foundation, said that the members of the Nigerian political and business elite were competing in a game called 'state capture.'

He defined state capture as a situation where a country that is supposed to work for 200 million people, works for a handful of people.

The former group chairman of Stanbic IBTC Holdings said that the political and business actors were working to ensure that Nigeria only works for them.

"The common trend that I see today, 2024, is that many actors; political and business actors, are actually competing in a game called 'state capture.'

"The Nigerian state is supposed to work for 200 million Nigerians, but I'm concerned that this set of people are making sure that it doesn't work for 200 million Nigerians, it only works for them- a handful of people," he said.

Speaking on the theme of the event, Atedo identified nine major mistakes Nigeria made. This includes the first military coup in January 1966 and a counter coup that followed in July.

He mentioned the civil war, which led to the destruction of many



L-R: Atedo Peterside, chairman, Anap Jets Limited and chairman of the occasion; Olubukola Monisola Oyawoye, a professor and discussant; Ike Nwachukwu, retired general and chairman of the day; Reuben Adeleye Abati, discussant, and Bayo Rotimi, moderator, at the 4th Nigerian Leadership Colloquium in Honour of Pastor Ituah Ighodalo's 63rd Birthday, with the theme, 'Mistakes Nigeria Made.'

lives and property in the country.

The Anap chairman also mentioned the introduction of religion in politics by the elite, lack of conflict resolution mechanism, enthrone of injustice and rewarding bad behaviours as major mistakes made by the country.

He added that people no longer believe in serving but getting reward from the office and Nigerians no longer believe in their leaders' words.

Peterside also said that parts of the mistakes Nigeria made was the destruction of standards in the civil service by the military.

According to him, "We have never adopted global best practices of resolving crisis; the words of leaders are no longer their bonds; we enthrone injustice; we reward bad behaviours, among others."

Speaking on the solutions to the country's problem, Peterside called for electoral reform, advocating for the use of the National Identification Number (NIN) instead of Permanent Voter's Card (PVC).

He argued that the former has more elaborate data than the latter, which enables rogue electoral officers to overturn the will of the people.

He also urged citizens to continue holding the leaders accountable for their actions, saying that the whistleblowers must not stop to expose wrongdoings.

He called for a strong opposition to strengthen the country's democracy and hold the government accountable.

The Chairman of the occasion, Ike Nwachukwu (RTD), posed 38 questions that required genuine attention in considering and

proffering solutions

Some of these questions included, "was our unwillingness to renegotiate Nigeria's continued existence as a country a mistake?"

Nwachukwu pointed out that the solutions to Nigeria's and its people's problems will emerge when the nation genuinely addresses and answers these questions and many more that will emerge from this colloquium.

"And I also believe that from these answers will come, quite easily, the will to do right by all manner of peoples and interest groups that form the main ingredients of the

Only by courageously facing the truth can Nigerians and Nigeria begin to heal from the mistakes and hurts of the past and commence the transformation to a better future

Nigerian state and country.

"The 2014 National Conference did. That is why all the delegates by consensus made the crucial recommendations to salvage Nigeria. And I strongly recommend that we do not set them aside.

"Only by courageously facing the truth can Nigerians and Nigeria begin to heal from the mistakes and hurts of the past and commence the transformation to a better future," Nwachukwu said.

Speaking on the current structure of Nigeria, he stressed that there was the need to decentralise government, warning that the current system was not viable.

He noted that all states in the country had the potential to develop with the available resources at their disposal.

According to him, "We must decentralise the country, every state would be in control of its resources and percentage given to the central government."

Nwachukwu further called for electoral reforms ahead of the 2027 polls, noting that flawed polls were inimical to the progress of the country and lead to apathy among the populace especially the youth.

He said the youth of the country have tremendous potential that could be tapped into if they are given a chance to excel.

"We can't have an election where there are so many flaws in the system, not only are we digging the country to oblivion, we are denying young Nigerians the opportunity to lead."

In his contribution as one of the discussants, Reuben Abati, said that

with the high youth population in the country, there was the need for the Federal Government to declare a state of emergency on education and increase investment in the sector, so that the nation's youths can compete globally.

"We need to capture the youth population via education in a world that has become competitive. This should be a national priority and a national emergency so that we can have youths that can compete in the future," Abati said.

Abati warned that strong opposition in the country was crucial for democracy to thrive and for good governance, citing examples with Senegal and other countries.

"Informed opposition that is committed to the common good and not name-calling is vital in a democracy," Abati stressed.

Another discussant, Olubukola Oyawoye, a professor, said Nigeria's greatest mistake was that, "we have not outlined our vision and our mission."

The Celebrant, Ighodalo, said honest conversation was the only thing that could change Nigeria.

He said, "It is conversation, conversation, conversation. What is critical to me is that in this business of Nigeria we should go back and discuss Nigeria.

"If the foundation is not right, we have to knock it down and build it again."

The event was attended by high profile Nigerians, including Donald Duke, former governor of Cross River State; Sam Amuka, publisher of Vanguard Newspaper, business and media executives, among others.

Politics

Wike's ally, Okocha, reacts to Afenifere's 'hot air'

...says Tinubu knows FCT Minister's factor to his victory

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The Caretaker Committee Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Tony Okocha, has deflated the blows thrown at the FCT Minister by a group calling itself the Afenifere Progressives Youth Movement (APYM).

The group had blasted the former governor of Rivers State, accusing him of being ungrateful to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

The group also wrote all what Wike did to help Tinubu win, saying the president never mentioned Wike's name in his inaugural speech when mentioning those that made him president, but rather said Tinubu merely helped Wike with the appointment of FCT Minister.

The group accused Wike of injuring the political fortunes of the president by stoking crisis in Rivers State always and causing some ripples in Abuja instead of adding value to Tinubu's national acceptability, according to a statement credited to Abe Emmanuel Kola, said to be the head of the Lagos group.

Reacting in a message to BusinessDay, Okocha, who is also the Rivers State Representative to the board of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), said the talk did not warrant his attention especially when on a burial event outside Rivers State.

He however, explained thus: "I don't find any rationale or merit in responding to a group that is omniscient and omnipresent.

"They are in Lagos and know everything. I will not patronise or dignify their shenanigan. President Tinubu knows the issues and what



Nyesom Wike

played out in Rivers State.

"Apart from him, I am the most qualified to speak on Tinubu's electoral victory in a state perpetually betrothed to the PDP. Wike was the spin doctor."

He made it clear that Wike's contributions to Tinubu's electoral victory transcended above Rivers State. "It is a fact in the mouths of even babes and the suckling."

The Afenifere group spoke in Lagos at a press conference where Kola said it was preposterous for Wike to lay claim to a mandate he allegedly didn't contribute to.

According to Kola, the former governor is not only an ingrate but a liability to the current administration.

The youths, therefore, advised Wike to focus on his job and tread cautiously in his public conduct and misleading narrative.

Claiming to put issues in proper perspective for all and to caution the FCT Minister on his public utterances about the electoral victory of President Tinubu, the Afenifere group stated: "The fact remains

that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is a political warrior and strategist who built bridges across the nooks and crannies of the country. He has remained relevant in the political landscape since leaving office as governor of Lagos state in 2007.

"This brings to mind the numerous efforts of the President and his associates of like minds who worked tirelessly for the President's electoral victory during the elections that culminated in a resounding victory.

"The Afenifere Progressive Youths Movement is aware of the contributions of various stakeholders. The FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, does not stand in as one of those who contributed to the President's electoral success.

"That President Bola Ahmed Tinubu elected to bring the FCT Minister on board, his administration should not be misconstrued as rewarding him for working towards his electoral success, but rather a form of lifeline given the precarious situation Wike found himself after

his tenure as governor of Rivers state."

Kola said the statement of fact can be easily corroborated by stakeholders in the APC and other support groups that worked tirelessly during the elections to deliver victory to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

"It is, therefore, preposterous for Nyesom Wike to lay claim to a mandate he didn't contribute to. His public posturing is misguided and an affront to the sensibilities of those who worked tirelessly for the President's electoral victory.

"If we recall the election victory acceptance speech by the President, where he commended those who worked hard for the victory, the name Nyesom Wike was not mentioned. That is indicative of the fact that the role the FCT Minister claimed he played in the electoral victory of the President remains a figment of his imagination.

"The FCT minister is aware of this much and why he should tread cautiously in his public conduct and his misleading narrative that defeats common sense."

Afenifere said the FCT minister, by all indications, is a liability to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration with the crisis rocking Rivers State and other unpleasant occurrences connected to the FCT minister. The group cautioned Wike to stop the posturing.

"The task before President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is onerous, and the President and his team of patriotic Nigerians have been working around the clock to address the myriad of challenges in the country.

"The best the FCT Minister can do is to retrace his steps and be circumspect in his public posturing. He should focus on the job and key into the Renewed Hope Agenda of

the President instead of ascribing to himself the President's political success.

"It is not a hidden secret that the FCT Minister is a liability to the present administration, and it would be common sense if he turned a new leaf and channeled his energies towards serving our indefatigable President for magnanimously saving him from political obscurity."

He went on: "The FCT Minister cannot take credit for what he didn't give. It is tantamount to ingratitude. This is uncharitable and will be resisted by the Afenifere Progressive Youths Movement.

"It would be in the best interest of the FCT Minister to desist from such enterprise and channel his energies to more productive ventures in service to Nigeria," the statement added.

Though the Wike ally did not want to be drawn into arguments with those he said he did not know, in the past, Okocha had explained the criticality of the Wike factor in the Tinubu victory.

On the day he explained why Wike should be Tinubu's only point man in Rivers State and that the shares of Rivers APC should be given to him (Wike) to distribute, Okocha had shown how the APC had never won any election in Rivers State till Wike worked for Tinubu.

He had also shown that Wike boasted to stop Atiku and did it. He also said Atiku and the PDP did not win in any of the five states led by Wike that were called the G-5, saying if those states had voted for Atiku, that Tinubu would have lost, going by the slim victory with which Tinubu clinched the presidency. Okocha insisted that Wike must be in any room where Nigeria was discussed in the Tinubu presidency.

Plateau Governor appoints legal practitioner as SA media

HAPPY ZAROKADA

The Governor of Plateau State, Caleb Mutfwang has appointed a legal practitioner, Francis Zitas as Special Assistant on media.

Zitas is a former freelance journalist with a Lagos-based, The Mailnews Newspaper, and a former House of Assembly aspirant under Lantang North Central Constituency.

He is presently a practising lawyer under the Law firm of Orifumishe & Partners.

The legal practitioner has expressed gratitude to Governor Mutfwang for finding him worthy to be appointed as his special assistant on media.

He said he is very grateful for the consideration and honour bestowed on him by the governor for the appointment as no position is too small for one to show his capacity for what he can do in any position.

According to Zitas, "The Governor is a talk and do governor. He is delivering on the promises made to the people of Plateau state during

his campaign.

"His foresight is excellent and his thinking are futuristic. We thank God for giving Plateau state such a wonderful person as the governor.

"Speaking for myself I will be a media assistant who will toe the line of my principal. The governor is action packed and talk and do governor, touching lives in different ways in Plateau State.

"The governor came into office on the altar of rebuilding, restoring and repositioning Plateau State, and he went further to say that the time is now to make Plateau work again and by the time he will be one year in office on May 29 there will be a lot of things which are visible for everybody to see.

"He has engaged in massive roads constructions and where I live, he has constructed roads there and inside of Jos metropolis he has constructed roads there and he has given his full attention to security and partner with security agencies in Nigeria and has facilitated so many of their requirements to aid them in ensuring security of lives and property.

"This is one of the cardinal points

of his administration to ensure that there is peace and security in the state by translating into peaceful coexistence.

"He has brought about excellent policies like sharing of fertilizers to farmers free of charge and also giving out of fertilizer at a very subsidies rate.

"He has also formed a committee to look into internal displaced persons (IDPs) scattered all over the place in the State. He has gone further



in fostering cordial relationship between the two major religions in the State; Christians and the Muslims on the Plateau.

"Governor Mutfwang is doing excellently well in all the local government areas of the State and even the workers are not left out because no civil servant is owed salary since he came into office.

"And in other areas of the state economy he appointed a very eloquent and vibrant man who has knowledge and experience in legislative work and former tax guru, Hon. Pirfa Tyem who has worked with the Federal Inland Service as senior special adviser on revenue mobilisation to enhance the revenue collection of the state.

"And I believe that in the years to come during his tenure the Governor will do more for the state because he has open gates of opportunities for the people of the State in less than one year in office."

Also, the plateau State Governor, Barr. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang, has officially commissioned a Rapid Response Firefighting Vehicle generously donated by the Federal

Fire Service. This donation aims to bolster the state's firefighting capabilities and address the challenges posed by fire incidents.

Governor Mutfwang, who performed the ceremony at Government House Rayfield, Jos, expressed gratitude to the Director General of the Federal Fire Service for the invaluable contribution. He reiterated his commitment to providing continuous support to enhance the effectiveness of firefighting operations within the state.

Acknowledging the significance of this gesture, Governor Mutfwang emphasised the alignment of the Federal Fire Service's support with his administration's vision to elevate the state's firefighting services to national standards of excellence.

"This generous donation serves as a catalyst for our comprehensive review of firefighting mechanisms across the state. We are steadfast in our resolve to elevate and sustain the standards of our firefighting department through increased funding, advanced training, and modern equipment," he affirmed.

How INEC's moral burden is affecting elections after 2023

...As Commission prepares for Edo

INIJOBONG IWOK

After the controversy that trailed the conduct of the 2023 general election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), observers say a surgical reforms in the commission to regain the confidence of Nigerians ahead of future elections was imperative.

Although, in a recently released official review of the 2023 general election, barely one year after the election, the commission insisted that the outcome tallied with the wishes of voters.

But many Nigerians believed that INEC's conduct of the 2023 general election was not different from the past, in which the process was not free, fair and transparent. Observers believed that while there was little progress, it was not significant.

Across the four major political parties in the country, there was contention about the commission's handling of the elections, especially the presidential poll by candidates and stakeholders.

In the elections, there were 431 cases from 10 out of the 18 political parties that contested. Governorship petitions from many states were determined by the Supreme Court. This means that ultimately, the court decides election winners in Nigeria.

Many say the conduct of the 2023 election was a repeat of the 2011 and 2007, in which then elected President, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua openly admitted that the election that brought him to power was fraudulent.

However, this is despite assurances, in the run-up to the 2023 poll, where the commission promised to deliver to Nigerians "the best election ever."

The promise stemmed from the much-expected implementation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and INEC Election Result Viewing Portal (IREv) technologies, two revolution tool that the commission said would address problems of over-voting and delay in result transmission which had characterised previous polls.

The poor conduct of elections has led to poor voter turnout, and there are fears it could get worse if nothing is done. Presently, the already existing trust gap between the people and the commission has worsened.

"The explanation on technical glitch given by Festus Okoye did not fly. Don't forget, we are in a society where there is so much trust deficit between the people and the government and her agencies.

"Nobody trusts anybody here, we don't even trust the machine, that is why when you collect money from the ATM you still count the money, if we don't trust machines how do we trust people?"

"The nature of trust is such that it must be earned; you don't just trust



Mahmood Yakubu

people or a system except such people earn your trust," Tope Musowo, public affairs analyst, said.

Even the last November off-cycle gubernatorial elections in Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa didn't produce anything cheering, as desperate politicians allegedly colluded with INEC's officials to manipulate the elections in their favour.

The inability of the Nigerians' votes to count in the 2023 election worsened voter apathy in the off-cycle gubernatorial election last November, and there are fears it could get worse if nothing is done urgently.

President Bola Tinubu was elected with a turnout of 27 percent. This is the lowest since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, and a 44-year downturn compared with the 34.6 per cent recorded in 1979.

Ahead of future polls, many experts have said that Nigeria needed holistic reforms to regain public confidence in the electoral process and part of it should be the resignation of the INEC Chairman, Mahmood Yakubu, saying if he had any shame at all he should leave the stage.

But the man is still there and expected to complete his second tenure of five years.

"INEC's morality has become a burden for Nigerians. How do they expect people's reliability on their functions going forward with what we saw last year, recent elections do not give hope either, Babatunde Olarewaju, politician and political analyst said.

Many Nigerians say the commission will continue to battle serious trust issues post 2023 and in the coming off-cycle elections, until it comes out clean on what happened

to the IRev and the transmission of the presidential election results from the polling unit in the 2023 general election.

Jidefor Adibe, professor of Political Science, said INEC chairman should have resigned in the wake of the 2023 election.

Adibe said INEC chairman has lost credibility and Nigerians don't trust him.

According to him, "I think I will have said this several times even in 2019. INEC cannot deliver anything now because it has a legitimacy crisis.

"The first thing that should have been done is for Professor Mahmood to go. In climes where honour means anything, even if you feel you have done your best, to the extent that international and local observers have condemned and heavily criticised the conduct of the election, the best thing you should do is to step aside.

"His life does not need to depend on it. You step aside for the sake

.....

If INEC is serious, how many officials involved in the Imo and Kogi gubernatorial elections fraud have been tried and sacked? Since these guys can get away with these things, others would do more

.....

of the integrity of that institution. And for as long as it remains, I don't think anybody will think they can get anything from INEC."

Many Nigerians say the commission would have to work hard to close the trust gap in subsequent elections, and part of that involves cleaning its house and removing corrupt officials.

"If INEC is serious, how many officials involved in the Imo and Kogi gubernatorial elections fraud have been tried and sacked? Since these guys can get away with these things, others would do more", Festus Otu, political analyst, said.

As the off-cycle governorship election in Edo and Ondo States come up later in the year, stakeholders say INEC must go beyond recognising the pitfalls to taking actionable steps to improve election in the country.

"We need serious reforms; I think Nigerians are tired of coming out to vote and in the end it would not count. People don't trust INEC at the moment.

"The way INEC handled the 2023 presidential election will continue to cast a shadow of doubt on the credibility of both the commission and the man that superintended over that election," Onu Samuel, political analyst, said.

A political analyst, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that Nigeria must go and borrow a leaf from the seamless election in Senegal.

He said that the Federal Government understudy the election that produced Bassirou Diomaye Faye.

"Before the election, members of the opposition were targeted for intimidation and persecution. Those who raised a voice against

the oppressive government of Macky Sall were branded enemies to be crushed. Faye was arrested and incarcerated. The leader of the opposition party (Pastef), Ousmane Sonko, was detained and charged with insurrection last July.

"Upon his release, the government barred him from participating in the election. It was under his shadows that Faye emerged.

"It was obvious that Senegalese citizens had lost faith in Macky Sall, who moved from hero to villain. They went to the streets to protest. Even some religious leaders joined the protests. Although some citizens lost their lives in the protests, the people remained undaunted.

"They badly needed an alternative which they saw in Sonko. But when Sonko was barred, he gave his blessing to Faye and the people decided to queue behind him.

"The people spoke through the ballot. They showed that democracy was indeed, government of the people, by the people and for the people. And nobody rigged the election. Our INEC officials must cover their faces in shame. Smaller African countries are showing us the way. A great lesson indeed!"

He recalled that "Sally's attempt to extend his tenure was resisted by the country's judiciary."

According to him, "A responsible arm of government, or even agency, must always put the interest of the nation and of the people above that of an individual, no matter how highly placed.

"This spirit is lacking in Nigeria. Little wonder elections in Nigeria have been described by many as shambolic, and may remain so for many decades to come. Very, very worrisome."

Jide Ojo, popular current affair analyst said the country needs political reforms, not just electoral reforms, stressing that there was the need for the Electoral Offences Commission that will be well resourced and have the powers to make arrests, investigate, and prosecute electoral offenders.

Speaking, he said, "There is a need for the provision for early voting that will ensure that millions of potential voters (accredited observers, journalists, security agents and poll officials) who are not able to exercise their franchise due to their election day duties can vote ahead of the general election.

"Why can't INEC hold presidential, governorship, senatorial, House of Representatives and state Houses of Assembly polls in one day? It will save a lot of resources. I should also say that the lockdown of the country during polls is needless and does not in any way safeguard the security of the poll.

"It should be discarded. INEC should think of extending voting hours to a minimum of eight hours from the current six."

Political Strokes

with
Zebulon Agomuo

08023283822



Obaseki: 'That boy calls you father...lay no hands on him'

Politics is a dangerous game. It is like alcohol that intoxicates when it is taken in excess. Philip Shaibu, deputy governor of Edo State, is in the eye of the storm, perhaps, because of the intoxicating nature of this game called politics.

In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a wise counsel was given, which may be appropriate here for the political good of Edo State.

"The ransom Ikemefuna" had grown up to know and call Okonkwo father, The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves had just decreed that the poor boy be killed. Since Okonkwo was one of the elders that will execute that decree, Ogbuefi Ezeudu (or his friend Obierika?) advised him to, while being present at the event, refrain from bearing a hand in the very act of killing Ikemefuna – because he calls him FATHER.

But Okonkwo wouldn't listen. And like Brutus of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, it was him who struck the blow that saw Ikemefuna dead. This was exactly what happened: "He [Okonkwo] heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak."

In 2020, when the struggle for re-election thickened. The platform- (All Progressives Congress (APC)- under which Godwin



Obaseki won the governorship election in 2017 was no longer guaranteed for him. He defected to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) on June 16, 2020 and declared to contest for the election in September of that year.

Within this period, many deserted him, but with Philip Shaibu, they fought a brutal war. It was during

the period of lockdown occasioned by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

With Shaibu, they toured all the nooks and crannies of the state with the "big brother" backing of the then governor of Rivers State, Nyesom Wike.

Obaseki and Shaibu won a re-election in the election held on



September 19, 2020.

Fast forward, now, Shaibu wants to step into the shoes of his principal that would be made vacant in September. This ambition has since put a dagger between the two politicians who used to address each other as "brother."

Granted that Shaibu's ambition could be said to be insensi-

tive as there are other senatorial districts that should, in the name of equity, have a bite on the apple, he should have been brought in, cuddled and rocked to sleep in a proper way. And by the time he wakes up, his head would have cooled down.

He nursed an ambition, which is normal with every human being; he should be treated in the same brotherliness that saw them through in the days when the battle was fierce.

If the House of Assembly goes ahead to impeach him, it would mean that everything he laboured for in politics would have gone. It would mean that everything he is entitled to as a deputy governor, he would no longer enjoy. Haba!

Our very dear Governor Obaseki must and should cast his gaze back at yesterday when a smile from Shaibu gave him courage; when Philip's laughter gave him the reassurance he needed to soldier on and won his political battles.

A Catholic Priest, Very Rev. Father Andrew Obiyan, recently entreated Governor Obaseki to prevail on the House of Assembly to stand down the impeachment proceeding, saying: "May it not be in the annals of Edo political history that there was once a Deputy Governor, Philip Shaibu, impeached under your watch for his aspiration. It will be perceived as a sting of 'betrayal' and it will invariably redefine loyalty and aspiration as antithetical."

Insecurity: Political will Vs incompetence? The debate rages on

Successive administrations and governments have played lip service to the fight against kidnapping and banditry. Uncountable number of meetings have been held at the highest levels of government in the name of waging the war against insurgency and other assorted criminality, but they have yielded little or no result.

Since the coming of the current administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a lot of talks under different shades- seminars, summits, conferences and direct meetings with security apparatus- have been held, yet, there seems to be no positive outcome.

Many Nigerians are asking whether the failure of the government to confront the insecurity scourge, is a result of lack of political will or sheer incompetence?

At a meeting in Lagos Tuesday, some egg heads in the private sector pondered the question in relation to the seeming intractable nature of the scourge.

The meeting ended with the

summation that government's lack of political will to do the right thing was the reason insecurity has festered.

The meeting traced the genesis of Boko Haram insurgency, which was an offshoot of political thuggery that went awry.

The boys were recruited as political thugs. They were armed to the teeth, to kill and to maim political opponents. After the elections, when they had helped the politicians secure victory, they were discarded.

With the firearms they had, they began to fend for themselves. That was also how the Niger Delta militancy started.

A certain political figure was said to have recruited the boys and had given them guns to go after political foes.

With the aroma of money they were getting, there was no going back when their benefactor stopped doling out the money to them. They entered the creeks and began to kidnap oil workers, particularly expatriates.

Since the return of Nigeria to civil rule in 1999, politicians have found a dangerous ally in thugs during elections. The situation has continued to degenerate as the years progressed. The elections of 2015,

2019 and 2023 were said to have seen a high-level recruitment of bad boys for hatchet jobs.

After these boys killed and maimed as instructed, and snatched victory for their pay masters; hav-

ing found out that Nigeria is a place where crime pays handsomely, and that nobody even arrested them, let alone punishing them, they became a terror even to those who recruited them ab initio.

Since 2015, no one has heard that the Federal Government convicted and executed a kidnapper or any of those who kill farmers and chase Nigerians away from their ancestral farmlands.

What has happened to those who invaded some communities and wiped everything that had breath? Nobody has been punished for these heinous crimes.

How many state governors have signed off the execution of condemned criminals in their states? Perhaps, they do not have the conscience to do so, because the convicted criminals assisted them to power.

What is needed to rein in the insecurity scourge in the country is the Political Will on the part of government. Bad behaviour must be punished and seen to be punished.



Political Strokes

with
Zebulon Agomuo
08023283822



LP: Ajaero in dance of shame

In what has since been termed by many Nigerians as a shameful dance, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) recently picketed the national headquarters of the Labour Party (LP) in Abuja.

It also carried out similar exercise at the LP secretariats in many parts of the country.

It claimed that Julius Abure, national chairman of the party, was running the LP like his own personal estate. The leadership of the NLC accused Abure of trying to impose leadership on the LP.

Many Nigerians are wondering what the business of the NLC is with how a political party is run. Apart from the LP bearing "Labour", I am not sure how many Nigerians know the contribution of the NLC to whatever the party has achieved in all the elections it has participated, particularly the 2023 general election.

What was the role of the NLC in the LP efforts in the last Presidential election? The Labour union may have registered the LP as a party, but the party has its own soul. It is still opaque the level of financial contribution the NLC has made or is making towards the survival of the party.

When Nigerians expected the Joe Ajaero-led NLC to pull itself back from whatever involvement it has with the LP in order not to be seen as working for a particular candidate, since it should be apolitical (by virtue of its membership makeup), the association is busy killing itself the more.

The current NLC is totally castrated and no longer able to mobil-



ise reasonable crowd to move the Federal Government to abide by agreements. All the protests it has organised lately have ended up receiving cold-shoulders from many Nigerians. While some people cited integrity deficient-leadership as the

cause, some said the Labour union has so compromised itself to the point that it has lost the confidence of the suffering masses of Nigeria, particularly, the workers under their umbrella. These should be the major concerns to Ajaero and

his co-executive of the NLC, not to wrest power from Abure.

Perhaps, it was in an attempt to claw at anything that may give them relevance that they decided to picket the LP offices. Many Nigerians saw the move as part of the NLC's

time-tested character of selling out.

Now, having failed to protect the Nigerian workers who are still being pummelled by poverty, Ajaero and his co-travellers decided to play the ostrich. Let us wait and see how far this 'jangolova' will take them.

Otti and the zeal for new Abia

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State stirred the hornet's nest recently when he moved against the hefty packages that were being received by past governors and deputy governors of the state.

Otti repealed the law that okayed the pensions and attracted to him cheers and jeers from various quarters.

The governor reasoned that it was immoral for former governors and their deputies, who are wealthy enough to take care of their financial needs to continue to be a drain pipe on the state.

He was uncomfortable with the army of retired civil servants that have not received their peanuts pensions whereas millions of Naira is escaping the state coffers on a regular basis into the bank accounts of former governors and their deputies.

Abia, until now, has been de-

scribed by many people as a badly run state since 1999. The allegation was that the former chief executives helped themselves with the common wealth of the state.

While the misgovernance hastened, basic infrastructure that could have accelerated the growth and development of the state were not executed. For 24 years, the state collapsed in all fronts.

So, having presided over a state for eight years and left it bankrupt at your exit should not attract a reward but sanction. This was why Governor Otti believes there is no justification for the continued haemorrhage of the state's scarce resource through humongous pension payment to the architects of the misgovernance.

Otti explained that the step was aimed at reducing cost of governance.

"So, when you saw that we put through our resolve to cut cost of

governance by stopping frivolous payments to people who have left government (former governors

and their deputies), it is because we just believe that the right thing should be done. Very soon, we



will also be former governors. So, the policy is not targeted at anyone, it's targeted at good governance, it's targeted at reduction in the cost of governance. And quite frankly, we believe it is the right thing to do.

"We don't believe that politics is a business. We believe that people should have things they are doing before coming to serve. And if you have offered yourself to serve, then you should be willing to make the required sacrifices.

"If you find yourself in this place, you should count yourself lucky that people believe in you, gave you their support and their votes, it is a privilege and the least that is expected of you is to make sacrifices for the betterment of the state. So, the days of sharing money are over, the days of blood tonic politics are also over. This is the time to make sacrifices for the interest of the state."

Focus

Unlocking economic potential: Zamfara State Halal Economic Summit

BABA YUNUS MUHAMMAD

Zamfara State is gearing up for an unprecedented event that could potentially redefine its economic landscape - the Zamfara State Halal Economic Summit. This historic event, which is scheduled to take place in the state capital, Gusau in May 2024, represents a pivotal moment in Zamfara State's quest for economic rejuvenation and sustainable growth, spotlighting investment prospects, harnessing potentials, and capitalising on the burgeoning Halal economy. Set against the backdrop of socio-economic challenges, this Summit, being orchestrated by the Africa Islamic Economic Foundation (AFRIEF), an international Islamic development organisation headquartered in the Republic of Ghana, and convened under the Distinguished Patronage of His Excellency, Dr. Dauda Lawal, the Executive Governor of Zamfara State, emerges as a beacon of hope, offering a strategic platform for growth and development.

At the heart of this endeavor lies a visionary approach to economic development - one that views industrialisation as the cornerstone of transformation, progress, and poverty reduction. Under the visionary leadership of Dr. Dauda Lawal, the Zamfara State Government has made a strategic commitment to prioritise job creation and industrialisation, recognising them as pivotal drivers of development.

This strategic agenda dovetails seamlessly with the broader imperatives encapsulated within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming to significantly augment industry's contribution to employment and GDP within the state.

The Zamfara State Halal Economic Summit transcends mere rhetoric - it



Governor Dauda Lawal

represents a concrete manifestation of the State's determination to harness the power of industrialization for the collective good. More than just a forum for dialogue, this summit serves as a catalyst for action - a platform where aspirations coalesce into actionable strategies and tangible outcomes.

At its nucleus lie the ambitious plans for establishing Special Halal Economic Zone and Rural Transformation Centers across the state, envisioned as engines of innovation, productivity and trade. The Summit serves as a catalyst for identifying and capitalising on investment opportunities across various sectors. From agribusiness to Islamic finance, the summit offers a platform for investors to explore lucrative ventures and forge strategic partnerships with local stakeholders. One of the key investment prospects of the summit lies in the Halal food industry. With an increasing global demand for Halal-certified products, Zamfara can

leverage its agricultural resources to become a hub for Halal food production and export. This not only creates opportunities for local farmers and agribusinesses but also positions Zamfara State favorably in the international Halal market.

A Special Halal Economic Zone (SHEZ) holds special significance within the context of the Halal economy. By designating an area specifically tailored to accommodate Halal industries and businesses, a Halal focused SEZ provides a conducive environment for investment, innovation, and trade. It offers streamlined regulatory frameworks, infrastructure development, and incentives to attract domestic and foreign investors interested in Halal-related activities. Additionally, a Halal focused SEZ serves as a focal point for research and development, fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and government to drive technological advancements and product innovation in Halal sectors.

Moreover, by clustering Halal-certified businesses within these zones, Zamfara State can create synergies, promote knowledge sharing, and drive economies of scale, thereby maximising the potential of the Halal economy.

Driving this ambitious agenda forward is the Africa Islamic Economic Foundation (AFRIEF), which is steadfast in its commitment to galvanising the global Islamic finance industry and mobilising public and private sector investments to propel Zamfara State towards industrialisation. With a strategic emphasis on key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and industrialisation, AFRIEF lays the groundwork for a profound structural overhaul of Zamfara's economic landscape.

To comprehend the full magnitude of the Zamfara State Halal Economic Summit, one must delve into the broader context of the global halal economy. Encompassing a diverse array of sectors including food,

finance, tourism, cosmetics, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, and more, the halal industry represents a burgeoning market with exponential growth potential.

With an estimated global Muslim population exceeding 1.8 billion, the Halal market represents a significant economic force. According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report, global expenditure on Halal products and services is projected to reach \$3.2 trillion by 2024, highlighting the immense potential for growth and innovation in this sector. With the global Muslim population on the rise and an increasing demand for halal-certified goods and services, tapping into this market presents unparalleled opportunities for economic expansion and diversification.

Furthermore, the Halal economy extends beyond religious considerations, encompassing principles of ethical consumption, sustainability, and social responsibility. As consumers become increasingly conscious of the origins and production processes of goods and services, the demand for Halal-certified products continues to rise. This trend presents opportunities for businesses and governments alike to capitalise on the Halal economy's principles of integrity, quality, and inclusivity.

From Malaysia to the Middle East, the Halal economy transcends geographical boundaries, offering opportunities for collaboration and partnership on a global scale. Through initiatives such as the Zamfara State Halal Economic Summit, stakeholders have the opportunity to leverage the power of the Halal economy to drive sustainable development, foster prosperity, and build bridges across cultures and continents.

Against the backdrop of Zamfara State's socio-economic fabric, characterized by its predominantly

rural populace and agrarian economy, the potential benefits of the summit are manifold. By fostering an enabling ecosystem for industrialization and entrepreneurship, the summit holds the promise of unlocking Zamfara State's latent economic potential, generating employment opportunities, and improving living standards.

Furthermore, the Summit serves as a conduit for attracting both domestic and foreign investments, facilitating technology transfer, knowledge exchange, and skills enhancement. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative initiatives, Zamfara State can harness its unique strengths and resources to emerge as a preeminent hub of halal-centric industries.

Additionally, the summit serves as a platform for knowledge exchange and capacity building, equipping local entrepreneurs and businesses with the skills and resources needed to thrive in the global Halal market. This not only enhances the competitiveness of Zamfara's economy but also positions the state as a center of excellence in Halal-related industries.

In conclusion, the Zamfara State Halal Economic Summit represents a pivotal moment in the economic trajectory of the state and the broader Islamic economic community. By embracing the principles of the Halal economy and leveraging its inherent strengths, Zamfara has the potential to emerge as a beacon of prosperity and progress in the Federal republic of Nigeria. Under the visionary leadership of Governor Dauda Lawal and with the support of the Africa Islamic Economic Foundation, this summit is poised to chart a new course towards sustainable development, transforming challenges into opportunities, and realising the aspirations of the people of Zamfara for a better, more prosperous future.

Personality

Idris Malagi: A refreshing example in public information management

TUNDE RAHMAN

Delivering a keynote address at a well-attended National Spokespersons' Summit and Awards on March 26 in Abuja, former Director-General of the Nigeria Television Authority, Professor Tonnie Iredia was excellent as he articulated what should constitute the critical success factors in the work of a spokesperson. The summit with the theme 'Change Narrative, Change Society' was organised by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and National Orientation. Participants at the summit included communication experts, top journalists, scholars and other dignitaries.

A spokesperson must build trust and credibility through transparent and truthful messaging, Iredia said. Such a person must place premium on facts. "A spokesperson must also employ clarity in his messaging. There should be no ambiguity. Such a person must deploy positive narratives. The spokesperson must be detailed and persuasive and make sure that he or she is first with the information to avoid speculation. Feedback is important and must be prioritised," he pointed out among other nuggets.

Iredia's presentation was greeted by a round of applause at the expansive hall of the International Conference Centre, Abuja.

An erudite scholar, lawyer, administrator and communication expert, Prof. Iredia knows his onions and has earned his stripes. He worked with the then Midwest Television in Benin-City (now Nigerian Television Authority) where he rose to become Manager, News and Current Affairs. In the early 1990's, he was Director of News and Current Affairs of Professor Humphrey Nwosu's National Electoral Commission. He was the one most of us Political Correspondents of the time (this writer inclusive) related with on the job. In 2002, he was appointed Director-General of the National Orientation Agency and later the Director General of NTA in 2003. As DG of NTA, Iredia was the number one PR person and topmost reporter of that agency.

It would appear the former NTA DG had the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Alhaji Mohammed Idris Malagi, a seasoned communication consultant and media mogul in mind, in his brilliant and lucid diagnosis. This is because in his handling of the Federal Government's information and public communication machinery, Malagi parades all those essentials of effective communication brilliantly



Idris Malagi

encapsulated by Iredia.

Malagi is humble, cool, calm, not loud, factual, truthful and evinces believability in his appearance, carriage and conduct.

In his speech at the summit, Malagi himself identified the imperatives of some of the earlier mentioned principles behind effective public communication. He said Nigeria is a diversely blessed and vibrant country, grapples with the need to create a cohesive national identity; one that transcends ethnicity, religion, and political affiliations, and as such "crafting a compelling national narrative becomes paramount as we strive to live up to our vast potential."

According to him, as communication professionals, the spokesperson must be aware he plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions, disseminating accurate information, and fostering trust. "Indeed, the nation's peace, stability, growth, and development can only be attained by how we communicate. We must recognise the critical role that effective communication plays in shaping narratives, building trust, and fostering understanding."

Both Iredia and Malagi harped on the significance of trust in public communication or indeed in any communication for that matter. The Minister of Information puts this succinctly: "The future of communication points towards technology, but for technology to make a meaningful impact, it must

be anchored on trust. Trust remains a critical element in building relationships; be it at personal, group, and even community levels. As spokespersons, we need to make conscious efforts to build trust and restore hope wherever we are. Building and maintaining trust must be a collective responsibility. For trust to have value, it must be anchored on authenticity, transparency, and consistency."

Like Iredia who stressed that both external and internal publics are important and that all stakeholders should be carried along because a disgruntled person within the system can endanger the messaging, Malagi also spoke about collaboration and

While technology allows us to personalise messages like never before, collaboration enables us to build consensus among colleagues, stakeholders, and experts

inclusivity at the summit.

"The current trend of communication is driven by technology. While technology allows us to personalise messages like never before, collaboration enables us to build consensus among colleagues, stakeholders, and experts."

Indeed, Malagi not only believes in his precepts, he practices them. He tries to carry everyone along in an all-inclusive manner. That he acts out his preaching is evident enough in the way and manner he carries on as Information Minister, which is perhaps why he is achieving bounteous positive results.

For instance, as he stepped out as minister he constituted a National Communication Team headed by him and comprising the Information, Strategy, Media and Publicity Managers in the Presidency and Director-Generals of Information and Communication agencies under him to build consensus and synergy and promote collaboration on the important task of disseminating the policies and initiatives of the government and its agencies under the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Tinubu. The team will also track post-messaging feedback.

Recently, the National Communication Team was on tour of Kano, Jigawa and Kaduna states in the North-West. In Jigawa, the team visited wheat, millet and maize farms, an example of dry season farming, which raised the

likelihood of the state meeting the expected national targets for domestic consumption and exports.

The team also engaged in an interactive session with the farmers, millers, and other important stakeholders in dry season farming in the state. In Kano, after meeting and exchanging ideas with senior journalists and social media influencers in the North who had converged on the city, the team returned to also interface with the business community in that commercial city on the government's economic programmes, their impressions, expectations and challenges.

Arriving in Kaduna to attend the annual Ramadan Lecture organised by the NTA and Voice of Nigeria and attended by prominent Islamic scholars and Emirs from the North, the team opted to return to Abuja by rail so it could inspect the facilities at the train station in Kaduna and interview some of the operators and passengers using the train.

The Information Minister's speeches on these visits were also remarkable. The speeches reek of the passion and enthusiasm he takes to the job.

Speaking when he paid a courtesy call on Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf of Kano State, he said: "We are here in Kano as representatives of His Excellency, Mr. President, to meet with Nigerians, from various walks of life. The President has tasked us with engaging with various groups of stakeholders, to share and explain what his administration has been doing to make life better for all Nigerians, and to ask for patience and understanding in the face of the economic challenges we are experiencing."

A day after at a stakeholders' meeting with the business leaders in Kano, he highlighted the achievements recorded so far by the Tinubu Administration to make Nigeria a better place to live, and do business and investment. He said the President is committed and has shown rare leadership on many fronts.

On why the team decided to return to Abuja by train, the minister said: "The National Communications Team embarked on a train journey back to Abuja from Kaduna after our stakeholder engagement in Jigawa, Kano and Kaduna. We had a fruitful interaction with commuters, welcoming their enthusiasm and noting their feedback. We reiterated the commitment of our administration to securing the lives and properties of travellers, safeguarding our rail infrastructure and improving the quality of service delivery."

• Rahman is a Senior Presidential Aide

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Prioritising Real Estate: A Key Driver of economic recovery and job creation in Nigeria

In the intricate context of Nigeria's economic challenges, the real estate sector emerges as a beacon of hope, offering potential amidst uncertainty.

In a candid conversation with Paul Onwuanibe, the esteemed group CEO of Landmark Group, we delve deep into the heart of this pivotal industry. Together, we explore the challenges and opportunities defining its landscape, uncovering its potential to not only drive economic growth but also alleviate the pressing housing crisis facing our nation.

Nigeria's recent reforms, including the removal of fuel subsidies and currency exchange rate unification, have created waves of uncertainty, profoundly impacting citizens' purchasing power. Real estate developers are navigating rough waters and dealing with unstable market conditions in the wake of these continental shifts, all the while trying to stay profitable.

Rising building material costs, fluctuating currency values, and escalating labour expenses deepen the sector's challenges, casting complexity over every endeavour. Yet, amid this turbulence, resilient developers pursue innovative strategies to weather the storm,

demonstrating determination and resourcefulness in overcoming obstacles.

Despite the sector's resilience, the neglect of real estate in government economic policies remains a glaring issue. Onwuanibe emphasises the sector's potential to generate over 80 million jobs and address the housing deficit of 28 million homes. Prioritising real estate development not only creates employment opportunities but also catalyses growth across the entire value chain, from construction to post-construction services.

However, a persistent challenge looms large: the scarcity of reliable data undermines the sector's growth trajectory and erodes investor confidence. Without a comprehensive understanding of market dynamics, developers struggle to gauge demand or forecast trends accurately.

This lack of information stifles innovation and dampens investor enthusiasm, hindering the sector's expansion.

Thus, the call for enhanced data transparency reverberates with urgency. Improved data accessibility becomes crucial for shedding light on market intricacies and providing stakeholders with actionable insights. With a clearer vision of market trends and investment

Nigeria's recent reforms, including the removal of fuel subsidies and currency exchange rate unification, have created waves of uncertainty, profoundly impacting citizens' purchasing power

opportunities, developers can chart a course towards sustainable growth, fostering a climate of trust and stability within the real estate landscape.

Despite prevailing macroeconomic challenges, Landmark Group remains steadfast in its commitment to redefine the real estate landscape. Leveraging its extensive experience and innovative mixed-use model, Landmark continues to provide unparalleled lifestyle experiences while contributing to economic

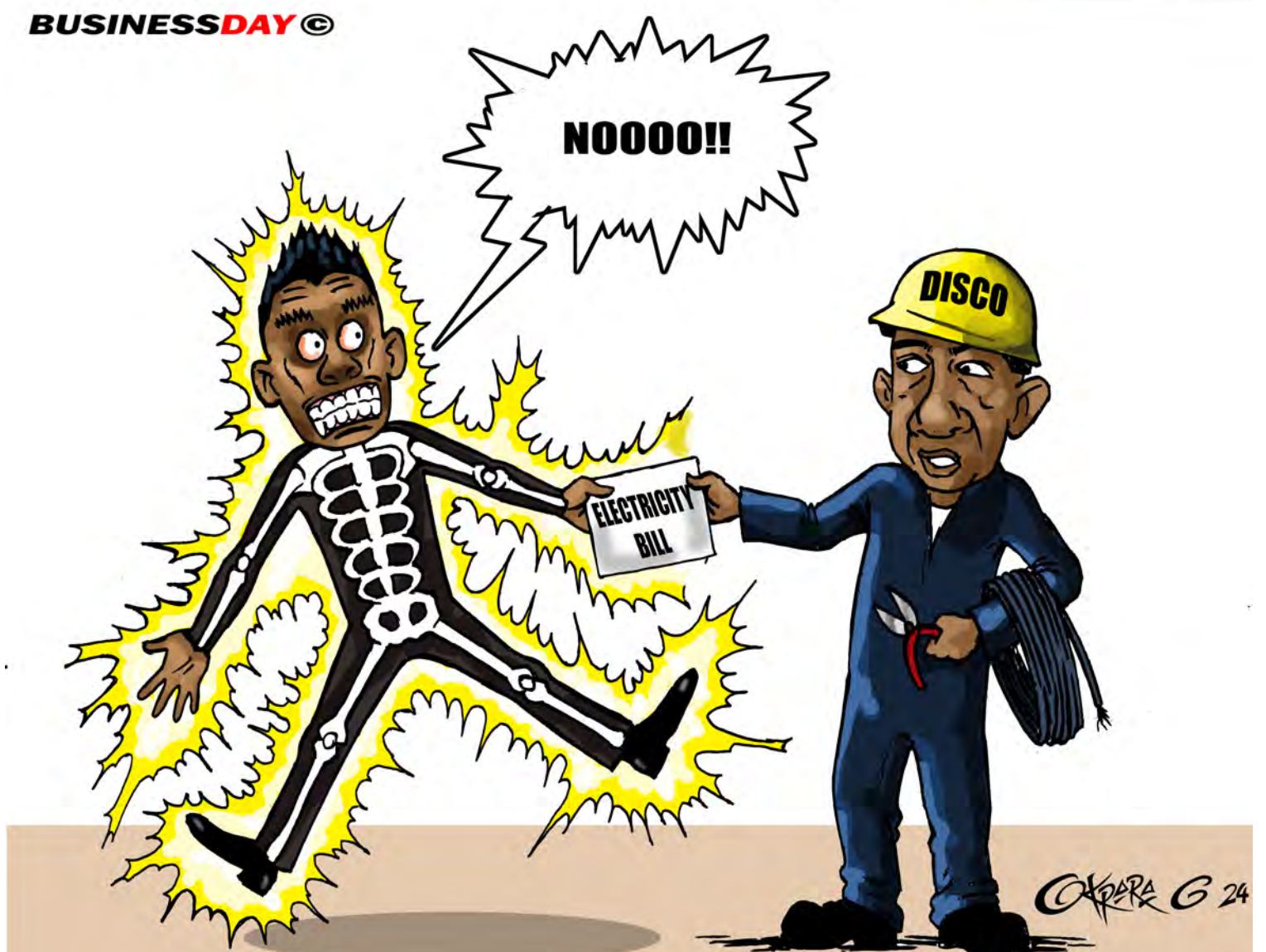
growth and job creation.

Looking ahead, collaboration between the public and private sectors will be paramount in navigating Nigeria's economic terrain. Creating an enabling environment for affordable housing and implementing supportive policies can empower the private sector to thrive, driving innovation and prosperity for all.

As the real estate sector navigates uncertainty and volatility, the imperative to prioritise its advancement becomes ever more pronounced. Real estate serves as both a barometer and catalyst for economic health, making its growth imperative for Nigeria's economic recovery and sustained prosperity.

By investing in infrastructure, policies, and frameworks conducive to its expansion, Nigeria can lay a robust foundation for long-term stability and progress. Fostering collaboration between public and private stakeholders, implementing innovative financing mechanisms, and promoting sustainable development practices will further bolster the sector's resilience and efficacy.

In doing all of these, Nigeria revitalises its real estate landscape, igniting hope for a brighter, more prosperous future for its citizens.



Perspective



BANJI OJEWALE

Kumuyi and a 60-year-old story



Dateline: Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, South West Nigeria, Sunday, April, 5, 1964. A Preacher is delivering a message in a church. Among those he's addressing is William Folorunso Kumuyi, 23. The lad is "almost like a moralist," as he listens and watches the cleric. The preacher is unrelenting as he insists that it isn't just our actions that make us unacceptable to God. Our wrong thoughts and wrong plans and leaving Him out of our programmes as if He doesn't exist also displease Him. After what must have been a battle within, young Kumuyi steps forward as the preacher asks those who have so condemned God to come out. They must be born again. Kumuyi says: "I felt drawn to what he (the preacher) was saying. I went forward, I knelt down and prayed. In fact, it was such an important day for me that I still remember it to this day, even where I knelt, how it all happened and the peace and joy that came to my heart, that now I was reconciled (converted, born again) to God through Jesus Christ. It was very definite."

This is the plain and ungarnished message the General Superintendent of Deeper Christian Life Ministry, DCLM, has told the world since: lost man must find his way to his Creator through Jesus Christ; he must be born again. There's no salvation elsewhere. Not in platitudinous religion, wealth, education, science, technology, philosophy, civilization, or any man-made contraption.

Related many times over the past 60 years by Kumuyi himself, this story has continued to don new relevance and added freshness because of the dizzying depths our values have plunged in our age. Pastor Kumuyi's ministry has now reached a crescendo with an offshoot called Global Crusade with Kumuyi, GCK. A non-denominational organization, it passionately takes the uncompromising born-again teaching to all parts of the world. When he holds his outreach in any country of the planet, the Deeper Life Bible Church leader lays hold on the levers of technology to access millions worldwide. There's a complex web and layers of organizational structures that ensure record attendances at international, national, subnational, regional and local venues.

Late March through to early April, 2024, GCK moved to Taraba, a provincial state northeast of Nigeria, bearing a new prong, a medical outreach for the poor and vulnerable. Those who receive the Word of God and become born again also

“
Except a man be born
again...he cannot enter
into the kingdom of God-
Jesus Christ.
”

have waiting for them God's tenderness for their health challenges. There's caring for the soul and the body.

In India in December 2023, the world was treated to surging crowds hardly witnessed at Christian gatherings in the subcontinent. Such was the acclaim given the Gospel of Christ during the trip that a book on the African cleric, Kumuyi: Defender of the Faith, was translated into Telegu, a major Indian language and presented to the public. Again, all the authors of the book project is what Kumuyi has stood for: except a man is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God. There's more, according to the pastor: if we don't teach that doctrine of Christ and believe and accept it, man can't enjoy stability and sanity in society.

What, then, is it to be born again? It is simply salvation from sin and the supernatural power it gives to live above going against the laws of Heaven and constituted authority. It is to receive a new birth midwifed by Christ Who calls the shots, sets the terms and conditions, and teaches you that there should be no more focus on death-laden laws of the old world. In other words, after being born again and forsaking your sins, your loyalty is to Christ and His precepts on love for fellow human beings and country

and community, holiness and consecrated preparation for the Heaven He has promised hereafter.

The alluring take is its salutary and concomitant effects on society. If you're truly born again, you become light years away from antisocial activities that bring you into conflict with the law and your neighbours. God's Kingdom is of peace, not of contention and violence. It doesn't accept greedy, selfish and manipulative leadership, either in the Church, home, workplace or in politics. You also abhor a competitive or vindictive spirit whose pursuit is fatal hatred for those you perceive as your enemies.

Once, the Police in Lagos invited Kumuyi to their office upon receiving a report that his "church is preaching about being born again." He said he went and met the Police Commissioner. The evangelist recalls: "I told him (Police boss) that I teach that ye must be born again and that when you are born again, your life will change; that we are the people (the born-again followers of Christ) changing (transforming) the country(the society)...I emphasised that it is people like me who are helping to procure peace in the country..."

Truly, a land that has experienced veritable transformation wouldn't breed thieving leaders and citizens, their iconic worship centres redefining the skyline notwithstanding. That their religious leaders are among the planet's wealthiest is immaterial. Heaven doesn't recognise them by those metrics; ye must be born again.

The world has fed on the religious philosophy disregarding the kernel of God's demand for a complete break with ungodly acts or motives suggestive of them. This has landed all humanity in

a miry meretricious mirage. Nigeria's religiosity hasn't given us the acuity of fraternity promised by the Scriptures. We don't love one another as God's Word commands. Why? We're not converted into new creatures in His way. That's the missing link.

It's the reason over there in Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa the other day, thousands of customers of a commercial bank exploited a "system glitch" to withdraw huge amounts far more than what they had in their accounts. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC, "over \$40m (£31m) had already been either withdrawn or transferred to other banks before the bank could freeze further transactions hours later." It was learnt that university students were mostly culpable as reports spread on the phone of the system error. Obviously, these fellows, even if they're 'First Class' resources don't have the God-being you possess when you are born again. They failed the main test, the Integrity Test. This is more of consequence in the sight of God and society.

Being born again gives you the God-being that transforms you and leads you to change your character, community and country. In my opinion, that's what Pastor Kumuyi meant when he told the Police chief: permit more teachings and practice of being born again and stand by to see the emergence of a new Nigeria freed from insecurity, man's inhumanity to man, corruption, failing governance, mismanagement of our rich resources, greed-driven government policies and the other demons of the polity.

Ojewale is a writer in Ota, Ogun State, South West Nigeria.

Perspective

Viewpoint

With
Afo



AFOLABI ABIODUN

Last week on my YouTube channel, I had an enlightening conversation with my two co-hosts, Ife and Kester, about pressing issues in the digital world, particularly the data breach at the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), Uber's nuanced data-sharing practices with Lagos State, and Google's effective clampdown on fraudulent advertisements. This engaging dialogue underscored the urgent need for enhanced controls to rebuild the general public's confidence in digital systems. In an era where data breaches and privacy concerns are becoming alarmingly routine, these incidents highlight the critical importance of data governance, transparency, and security.

The recent events involving NIMC, Uber's data sharing in Lagos, and Google's crackdown on scam ads serve as stark reminders of the vulnerabilities inherent in our digital ecosystems. They underscore the pressing necessity for comprehensive strategies aimed at safeguarding user data. Let's delve deeper into these instances and explore the multi-faceted approach required to protect and manage data responsibly in today's interconnected digital landscape.

The NIMC Data Breach: A Wake-Up Call

The disclosure by the NIMC that unauthorized access had been gained to the National Identification Number (NIN) database by expressverify.com highlights a significant breach in data security. This incident, under investigation by the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC), reveals how third parties, once authorized to provide verification services, can potentially exploit their access, jeopardizing the privacy and security of millions. The NIMC's subsequent restriction of access to its database, while necessary, also impacted genuine verification requests, illustrating the complex balance between accessibility and security. This scenario begs a larger question: How can institutions safeguard sensitive information against increasingly sophisticated threats?

Uber and the Quest for Data Sharing Balance

Uber's situation in Lagos, where concerns arose over the sharing of rider data with the state government, further complicates the discourse on data privacy. Uber's assurance that only aggregated trip data would be shared – not individual user data – reflects an attempt to balance regulatory compliance with user privacy. However, this incident sheds light on the broader challenges companies face when navigating government requests for data, emphasizing the importance of clear data sharing agreements and the need for transparency in how user data is utilized.

Google's Battle Against Scam Ads

Google's efforts to combat online scams, blocking over 206.5 million scam advertisements in a single year through the deployment of AI and partnerships with global anti-scam organizations, exemplify proactive measures taken by tech companies to protect consumers. Yet, the persistence and evolution of scam tactics highlight a perpetual arms race between security measures and bad actors. Google's approach demonstrates

Navigating the Digital Quagmire: A Case for Enhanced Data Governance and Transparency



the potential of technology in enhancing security but also underscores the need for continuous innovation and vigilance.

The Imperative of Data Governance and Continuous Improvement

These incidents underscore the critical need for robust data governance frameworks. Data governance – the collection of practices, guidelines, and standards that ensure the responsible use of data – is foundational to securing user data. Moreover, the role of both internal and external audits cannot be overstated. Internal audits allow organizations to consistently monitor and improve their data management practices, while external audits provide an unbiased examination, often revealing overlooked vulnerabilities.

Transparency in how data is collected, managed, and shared serves as the cornerstone of user trust. Companies must not only adhere to best practices in data management but also communicate their policies and actions clearly to users. The public's growing concern for data security demands more than just reassurances; it requires tangible evidence of secure practices and the open acknowledgment of incidents when they occur, coupled with details of the remedial actions taken.

Arguing for a Multifaceted Approach

The argument for enhanced data governance and transparency is compelling, particularly when considering the continuous efforts made by

companies like Google, employing AI to protect consumers. Technology undoubtedly plays a crucial role in identifying and mitigating threats. However, an over-reliance on technological solutions alone is insufficient. A multifaceted approach that includes policy reform, user education, and the fostering of a security-centric corporate culture is essential.

Conversely, there are concerns regarding the implementation of stringent data governance and transparency measures. Critics argue that excessive regulation may stifle innovation and burden companies with cumbersome compliance requirements. There's also the argument that too much transparency might inadvertently reveal security strategies to bad actors, potentially undermining their effectiveness.

Conclusion: Striking the Balance

These cases underline the critical need for policies that adhere to both local and international data protection standards, communicated transparently to users. NIMC's swift action to limit database access post-breach, and Uber's commitment to sharing only non-personally identifiable, aggregated trip data, exemplify the necessity of clear, comprehensive privacy frameworks. Integrating risk management frameworks such as COBIT, COSO, ISO, and GDPR can equip organizations like NIMC and Uber to better safeguard user data, instilling confidence in digital practices. It's through such committed transparency and adherence to detailed privacy policies that institutions can begin to rebuild and maintain the public's trust.

The journey towards enhanced data security and privacy is a collective endeavour, requiring a unified approach that merges diligent data governance, ongoing system improvements, transparent operations, and the strategic deployment of technologies like AI. The experiences of NIMC, Uber, and Google's proactive battle against scam ads highlight the complex challenges and potential strategies for securing our digital environment. Protecting user data against an array of evolving threats goes beyond technological innovation, demanding a commitment to ethical practices, user empowerment, and continuous dialogue among all stakeholders in the digital ecosystem. By championing data protection as a shared responsibility, we can strive towards a digital domain where public confidence is restored, and data security and privacy are paramount.

Tech Actor of the Week: Maya Famodu

Maya Famodu is a notable figure in the tech industry, known for her entrepreneurial spirit and contributions to the startup ecosystem, particularly in Africa. Born and raised in Nigeria, Famodu developed a passion for technology and innovation from a young age. She pursued her education in the United States, earning a degree in Computer Science from Stanford University.

After graduation, Famodu gained valuable experience working in various roles within the tech sector, including positions at top companies such as Google and Intel. However, it was her entrepreneurial drive that led her to found her own venture.

In 2015, Famodu founded Ingressive Capital, an early-stage venture capital firm focused on investing in African startups. The firm aims to bridge the gap between Silicon Valley and African tech ecosystems, providing capital, mentorship, and resources to promising startups across the continent.

Famodu's work with Ingressive Capital has garnered attention within the tech industry for its commitment to supporting innovation and entrepreneurship in Africa. She is a vocal advocate for diversity and inclusion in the tech sector, working to empower underrepresented groups and create opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs.

TECH
TALK
With Afo



Tech Actor
of the Week

Maya
Horgan
Famodu

CEO Ingressivecap

Analysis

Financial institutions and imperative of facilitating access to finance for Green SMEs

HOPE MOSES-ASHIKE

In Nigeria, the quest for sustainable development intertwines with the urgent need to address climate challenges.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in this narrative, as they represent a significant portion of the country's economy and can serve as engines of innovation and change.

However, their potential is often hindered by financial constraints and environmental pressures. This feature delves into the intersection of green SME funding and climate challenges in Nigeria, exploring the private sector participation in addressing the barriers and opportunities for sustainable growth.

The Landscape of Green SMEs in Nigeria:

Nigeria boasts a vibrant SME sector, comprising businesses across various industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services. Many of these enterprises possess the potential to adopt eco-friendly practices and contribute to mitigating climate change.

However, limited access to funding often stymies their efforts. Traditional financial institutions may be reluctant to invest in green initiatives due to perceived risks or a lack of understanding of sustainable business models.

Challenges faced by Green SMEs

Climate challenges exacerbate the struggles of Nigerian SMEs, especially those operating in vulnerable sectors such as agriculture. Erratic weather patterns, soil degradation, and water scarcity threaten productivity and livelihoods.

Additionally, inadequate infrastructure and unreliable energy supply further hamper the transition to sustainable practices. Without adequate support, SMEs face an uphill battle in adapting to these environmental challenges while remaining economically viable.

Climate action, emission reduction, and sustainable investment are no longer optional cost burdens. It is inevitable - and essential - that Africa and its private sector stay ahead of the curve.

Paris Agreement on Private Sector Participation

The full implementation of the Paris Agreement, for Africa, requires the active participation of the private sector, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) who are globally recognised as the key drivers of economic growth in Africa. SMEs make up over 90 percent of enterprises and account for up to 60 percent of job creation and economic development.

Their ability to reduce emissions and mitigate the environmental impact of their operations is a major determinant of Africa's progress in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Involvement of Nordic Development Fund and African Guarantee Fund

In 2016, the Nordic Development Fund (NDF) became African Guarantee Fund's (AGF) fifth shareholder. Under NDF's leadership, AGF launched a Green Guarantee Facility to unlock financing for SMEs investing in climate and green growth-oriented economy.

AGF has since then substantially fostered sustainable growth by offering the Green Guarantee Facility to lending institutions to enable them ease access to finance for Green SMEs. The Green Guarantee Facility aims to increase sustainable private-sector led economic growth in Africa, through efficient utilisation of untapped clean energy resources and other climate-resilient development initiatives.

To complement the Green Guarantee Facility,



AGF offers a Capacity Development Grant to both Partner Financial Institutions (PFIs) and Green SMEs. This enables the lenders to enhance their technical capacities while also ensuring that there is a pipeline of credit ready green SMEs that these PFIs can finance.

To facilitate a strong value chain in green financing, there is a need to lobby for national, regional, and international policies conducive for all players to support lending in this sector.

It is in view of this that AGF in partnership with NDF launched the Green Finance Conference & Training as a response to the challenges of climate change within the framework of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

The Green Finance Conference provides a platform for all stakeholders to dialogue and showcase the many advantages that Green SMEs can contribute to the economy.

The event aims to analyse opportunities and propose solutions necessary to meet the financing needs of Green SMEs to enable them acquire skills and technologies that can mitigate the effects of climate change. Previous conferences have been held in Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Benin, Mozambique, and Malawi.

The 9th edition of the Green Finance conference took place in Lagos, Nigeria under the theme: "The Role of Africa's Private Sector in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change."

The high-level conference was followed by a 3-day training on Credit Risk and Product Development in Green Finance, for senior managers of Financial Institutions.

The Green Finance Conference provided a platform for all stakeholders to increase their understanding of AGF's Green Guarantee Facility and how it enables banks on-lend to green and climate-smart projects.

Speaking at the Opening Ceremony, AGF Group Chief Executive Officer, Jules Ngankam emphasised the need for the financial sector to be aligned with the ongoing green transition.

"The green transition is defining a new way of living, a new way of doing business, and a new way of exchanging goods and services. At the core of this green transition are the commercial banks and it is imperative that they provide financing tailored to suit the needs of the Green SMEs."

"Our objective here is to provide enhanced expertise to Africa's financial ecosystem and to

propose practical solutions to increase financing of small and medium-sized enterprises so as to ensure green growth and climate-resilient development."

NDF Managing Director, Satu Santala said: "We are committed to financing green and inclusive low-carbon and climate resilient growth of African economies to improve the livelihood of communities."

"Partnerships are at the core of NDF's approach to climate finance and this partnership with AGF significantly supports Africa's private sector which plays a pivotal role in climate action while creating employment and prosperity in the continent. The private sector is also an essential source of financing and innovation in the transition towards green, resilient and sustainable economies and societies."

"At NDF, we provide both catalytic early-stage financing for African startups to develop climate solutions and also help them grow by crowding in investments through private equity and debt funds."

The President of the Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria, Kenneth Opara also noted the important role the private sector plays in climate change, emphasising that this unlocks new growth, creates jobs and drives sustainable agriculture.

Opara said: "We hope that climate change efforts will unlock new opportunities for green growth and job creation, ranging from renewable energy and clean technology to sustainable agriculture. There are countless avenues for the private sector to get the required solutions that deliver environmental, social, and economic benefits."

Special Adviser to the Lagos State Government on Climate Change and Circular Economy, Titilayo Oshodi, speaking on behalf of the Secretary to the State Government noted that Africa's private sector is a key driver of the success of the Paris Agreement. She said: "African businesses can accelerate the transition to a sustainable climate-resilient future by harnessing the power of entrepreneurship, innovation, and collaboration."

Green SME funding

Unlocking the potential of green SMEs requires innovative financing mechanisms tailored to their needs. Impact investors, development finance institutions, and government initiatives can play a crucial role in providing financial support and technical assistance to eco-conscious enterprises.

By offering grants, loans, or equity investments, these funding sources enable SMEs to invest in

renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste management, and other sustainable initiatives. Moreover, capacity-building programs can enhance their knowledge and skills in implementing green technologies and practices.

Opportunities for Collaboration and Innovation
Collaboration between stakeholders is essential to foster a conducive environment for green SMEs. Public-private partnerships can leverage resources and expertise to scale up sustainable projects and initiatives.

Furthermore, fostering innovation through research and development grants encourages the emergence of eco-friendly solutions tailored to Nigeria's specific climate challenges.

By nurturing a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation, Nigeria can harness the creativity and resilience of its SME sector to address pressing environmental issues.

Policy and regulatory support

Government policies and regulations play a critical role in shaping the landscape for green SMEs. Clear frameworks and incentives, such as tax breaks or subsidies for eco-friendly practices, can incentivise businesses to adopt sustainable approaches.

Strengthening environmental standards and enforcement mechanisms ensures compliance and fosters trust among consumers and investors. Additionally, promoting access to green financing through dedicated funds or guarantee schemes enhances the accessibility of capital for SMEs committed to sustainability.

In Nigeria's journey towards sustainable development, green SMEs emerge as key protagonists, driving innovation, job creation, and environmental stewardship.

However, their success hinges on overcoming financial barriers and navigating complex climate challenges. By prioritising green SME funding, fostering collaboration, and implementing supportive policies, Nigeria can unlock the transformative potential of its SME sector, paving the way for a greener, more resilient future.

Through concerted efforts and collective action, Nigeria can position itself as a leader in sustainable entrepreneurship, demonstrating the power of SMEs to catalyse positive change amidst climate uncertainty.

Media

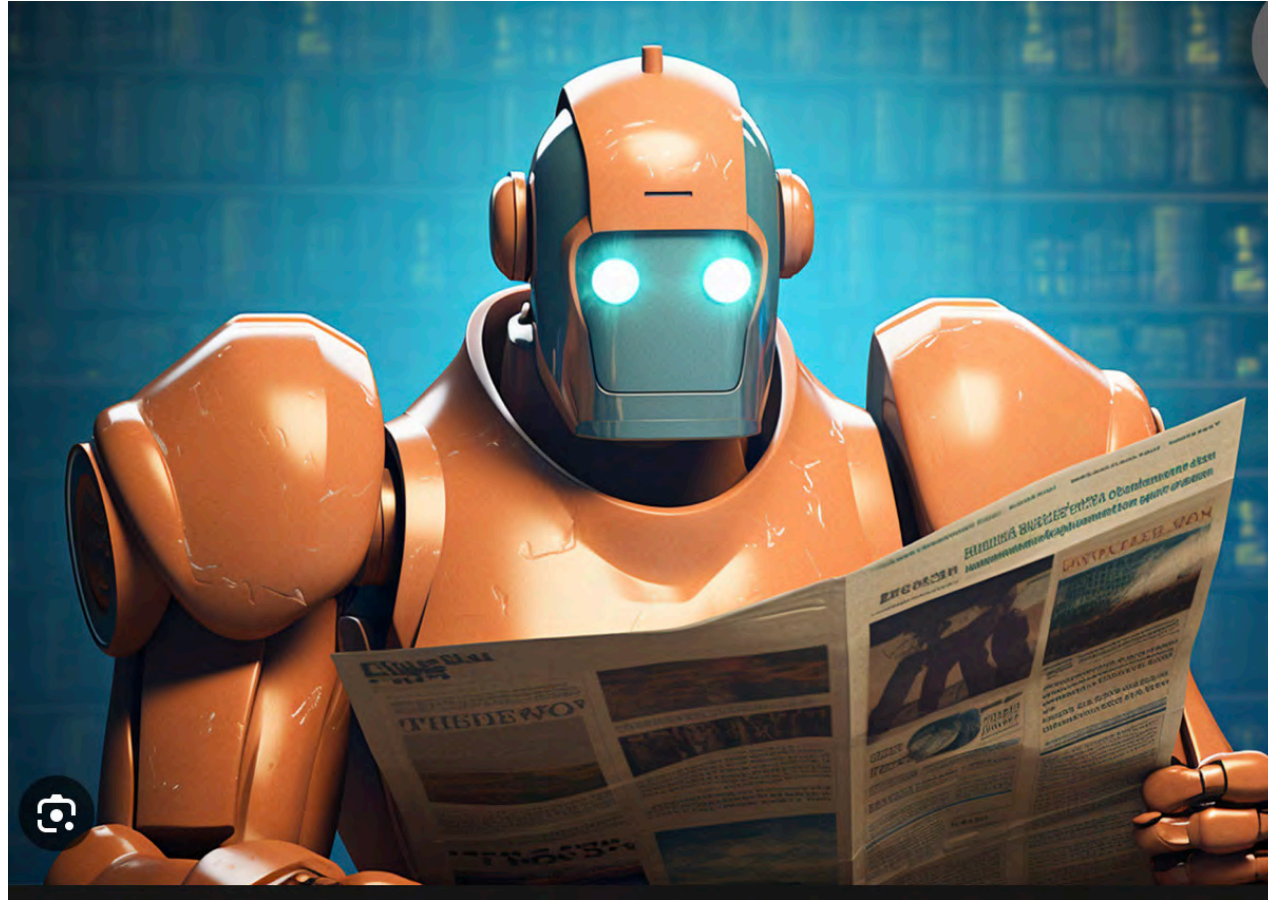
The transformative power of AI in print media: A focus on Africa

OJO EMMANUEL ADEMOLA

In the ever-evolving landscape of media, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to revolutionize print media in the Global South, particularly in Africa. AI technology offers a range of capabilities that can enhance efficiency, accuracy, and relevance in delivering news and information to audiences. As media outlets embrace AI tools, they have the opportunity to streamline editorial processes, improve content creation, automate fact-checking, enhance audience engagement, and personalize content delivery. This essay explores the impact of AI on transforming print media in Africa, highlighting the opportunities for innovation and growth in the region.

AI tools can play a crucial role in streamlining editorial processes within print media organizations in Africa. By automating repetitive tasks such as data analysis, research, and data entry, AI enables journalists to focus more on in-depth reporting and storytelling. This not only accelerates the production process but also improves the quality of content by providing journalists with more time to investigate and develop compelling narratives. Furthermore, AI can aid in content creation through natural language processing (NLP) and sentiment analysis, helping journalists identify key quotes, sentiments, and themes for impactful storytelling that resonates with audiences.

Moreover, AI-powered tools can automate fact-checking processes, helping to ensure the accuracy and credibility of news stories. In an era of widespread misinformation and deepfakes, AI can play a vital role in detecting and combating false information and safeguarding the integrity of journalistic work. By leveraging AI for fact-checking, media organizations can strengthen



their trust with audiences and uphold the principles of journalistic ethics and integrity.

AI technology also offers opportunities to enhance audience engagement and personalize content delivery in print media. By analyzing audience preferences, behaviour, and demographics, media outlets can tailor content to specific target audiences, increasing relevance and resonance. Additionally, AI can optimize advertising strategies, improve ad targeting, and maximize revenue generation for media organizations in Africa. Through AI-powered analytics and data-driven insights, print media can better understand their audience and optimize content strategies to attract and retain readers.

Before concluding this piece, let's consider issues, thought processes, and strategies for resolving the trending issues.

Issues:

One: Limited Data Availability: One of the challenges faced by media organizations in Africa is the limited availability and quality of data for audience targeting. Many regions lack robust data infrastruc-

ture and audience insights, making it challenging to effectively target ads to specific demographics.

Two: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: Africa is a region of diverse cultures and languages, presenting a challenge for advertisers to create targeted campaigns that resonate with local audiences. Adapting content and messaging to different cultural contexts requires a deep understanding of the nuances and preferences of various communities.

Three: Ad Fraud and Brand Safety: Ad fraud is a prevalent issue in the digital advertising ecosystem, posing a threat to the reputation and revenue of media organizations. Ensuring brand safety and transparency in advertising placements is crucial to maintaining trust with advertisers and audiences.

Thought Process:

To address these issues and optimize advertising strategies in Africa, media organizations can adopt a strategic approach that leverages AI technology and data-driven insights. The thought process involves:

One: Data Collection and Analysis: Media orga-

nizations can invest in data collection mechanisms to gather audience insights and behaviour patterns. By analyzing this data using AI algorithms, media outlets can identify audience segments, preferences, and trends to inform targeted advertising strategies.

Two: Audience Segmentation: Utilizing AI for audience segmentation can help media organizations categorize audiences based on demographics, interests, and behaviours. This segmentation enables personalized ad targeting and content delivery, improving relevance and engagement with audiences.

Three: Localization and Personalization: Tailoring ad content to local languages, cultures, and preferences is crucial for campaign success in Africa. Media organizations can use AI-powered tools to customize ad creatives and messaging for different regions, increasing the effectiveness and impact of advertising campaigns.

Four: Ad Verification and Brand Safety: Implementing AI-powered ad verification tools can help media organizations detect and prevent ad fraud, ensuring brand safety and

verification mechanisms and partner with reputable ad networks to ensure brand safety and transparency in advertising placements. Regularly monitor ad performance, detect potential fraud, and take proactive measures to safeguard the reputation of media organizations.

Four: Collaborate with Technology Partners: Collaborate with AI and ad tech providers to access cutting-edge solutions for optimizing ad targeting, enhancing audience engagement, and maximizing revenue generation. Work with industry experts to stay ahead of emerging trends and technologies in digital advertising.

By embracing AI-powered advertising strategies, media organizations in Africa can overcome challenges, enhance ad targeting, and drive revenue growth in the evolving digital media landscape. Prioritizing data-driven insights, personalization, and brand safety can empower media outlets to deliver impactful campaigns that resonate with audiences and advertisers, ultimately driving business success and sustainability in the region.

In conclusion, the integration of AI in print media has the potential to bring about significant transformation in Africa, enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and relevance in delivering news to audiences. By leveraging AI tools for editorial processes, content creation, fact-checking, audience engagement, and monetization strategies, media organizations in Africa can innovate and grow, ultimately improving the quality and impact of journalism in the region. As print media continues to evolve in the digital age, embracing AI technology presents a pathway to reimagining journalism and adapting to the changing media landscape in Africa.

•Ademola, Nigeria's first professor of cybersecurity, writes from London

transparency for advertisers. By partnering with trusted ad networks and platforms, media outlets can secure high-quality placements and maintain the integrity of their advertising ecosystem.

Resolution:

To optimize advertising strategies, improve ad targeting, and maximize revenue generation in Africa, media organizations can implement the following best practices:

First: Invest in Data Analytics: Enhance data collection and analysis capabilities to gain valuable audience insights for targeted advertising campaigns. Utilize AI tools for predictive analytics and audience segmentation to optimize ad targeting and improve campaign performance.

Two: Leverage AI for Personalization: Utilize AI technologies such as natural language processing and machine learning to customize ad content and messaging for diverse audiences in Africa. Tailoring campaigns to local cultures and preferences can increase engagement and drive conversions.

Three; Prioritize Brand Safety: Implement robust ad

Environment

Why there is hope for erosion-ravaged towns in Bayelsa

SAMUEL ESE, Yenagoa

Introduction

Coastal erosion has been a constant menace to several communities in Bayelsa State over the years without hope of any action by governments, administrations and relevant agencies.

But the recent visit of the management of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to Sangana Community in Brass Local Government Area of the state on the directive of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu over the threat of ocean surge raises hope for communities suffering similar fate in Bayelsa.

The visit has opened a new approach in the long struggle against erosion menace by riverine and littoral communities in the state.

The Tinubu-ordered quick intervention by the NDDC could be described as renewed hope for the Sangana people who have for years looked forward to such a time that their plight would receive the needed attention.

Sangana is one of the eight communities in Brass and Southern Ijaw Local government Areas that make up KEFFES Development Foundation under Chevron. KEFFES is an acronym for Koluama 1 and 2, Ezetu 1 and 2, Foropa, Fish Town, Ekeni and Sangana.

These eight communities on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean are oil producing and face the same fate due to ocean surge even as the original site of Koluama was washed away in 1952. This split the community into Koluama 1 and 2 that are faced with the devastating ocean surge.

So, one can imagine the joy of the people of Sangana at the visit of the NDDC delegation led by the Managing Director, Samuel Ogbuku, for an on-the-spot assessment of the level of devastation and also to present relief materials worth millions of naira.

Addressing the people, Ogbuku described President Tinubu as a caring leader who has the interest of his people at heart and expressed the President's joy at the peaceful disposition of the community in spite of its economic importance.

Oil exploration and exploitation activities have been going on in the community for several decades, but it has continued to maintain a high level of peaceful relationship with the international oil companies operating in the area.

Ogbuku said: "Before your letter of appeal arrived our head office in Port Harcourt, the ocean surge in Sangana was already publicised in the media. The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, saw it and directed that we must come and see what is happening in Sangana and give him feedback."

He told the people that he felt elated at the presidential directive which indicated that the country has a very responsible president who was interested in the welfare of



King of Sangana community, Moses Theophilus Kenibara (l) explaining a point to NDDC MD Samuel Ogbuku (2nd l).

the people, no matter how far they are from the centre.

He assured them of the determination of the Commission to salvage the situation, saying, "My presence in your community, apart from being a son of the soil, is in response to Mr. President's directive and having witnessed first-hand the devastation in your community, we will proceed immediately to see how we can salvage the situation."

While urging the people of Sangana community to continue to maintain the peace so as to attract development as development can only take place in a peaceful atmosphere, he assured them that the NDDC was going to use the best modern technology to tackle the Sangana erosion scourge.

He said: "We had earlier awarded the contract for shore protection in your community, but we are going to review it. The whole idea in NDDC is that we are also looking at new technology such as Geotube system. The system is also used in rebuilding and reclaiming the land naturally."

Ogbuku also used the opportunity to call on the multinational oil companies operating in the area to join hands in addressing the persistent ocean surge in the communities around the area as NDDC cannot do it alone.

"Having ascertained the situation on ground, we will go back and put the papers together and also see how we can partner with the state government and the international oil companies to see how we can all come together to ensure that we protect our communities," he said.

Chairman of the Sangana Council of Traditional Rulers, Moses Theophilus Kenibara VII, Amadabo of Moko-Ama Sangana, thanked President Tinubu for the love showered on the people of Sangana community.

Kenibara also used the opportunity to thank Mr. President for appointing their son from Bayelsa State as the Managing Director of NDDC and assured that the people of the community would continue to maintain the peace and cooperate with government for the develop-

ment of the country.

A former Chairman of Brass Local Government Area and community leader, Bello Bina, thanked Ogbuku for personally finding time to visit the community and commended him for his proactive nature.

Renewed Hope for other impacted communities:

The attention being received by Sangana community is an indication that communities that share a similar fate could also draw Federal Government attention to their plight and get remediation.

Bayelsa State which has the longest coastline of all the littoral states in Nigeria has a number of other communities impacted by ocean surge such as Agge in Ekeremor Local Government Area that are yet to receive the needed attention.

Described as 'more deltaic than Delta State and more riverine than Rivers State', Bayelsa is the flood plain of the country as the major rivers, River Niger and River Benue, empty their waters into the Atlantic Ocean through it.

As a depositional area, it is also full of sand bars and spits which affect navigation and in addition contribute to river erosion menace from which a large number of communities across the eight local government areas suffer.

Several of them like Obogoro on the Ekoli Creek in Yenagoa Local Government Area, Ayama in Ogbia Local Government Area and Anibeze in Sagbama Local Government Area are yet to receive the desired attention.

The present effort at Obogoro by the Bayelsa State Government can best be described as an exercise in futility as the work to create an alternative passageway for river is so slow to make any meaningful impact.

Communities affected by coastal

erosion have lost arable lands, houses and public infrastructure such as roads, schools, health centres and in some instances, lives, to the frothing and churning waters.

In very serious cases, they have had to abandon their sites and establish new sites as in the case of Koluama community in 1952.

That is why the Presidential directive on the Sangana ocean surge offers renewed hope in line with Mr. President's mantra of Renewed Hope for such communities in Bayelsa State and elsewhere in the larger Niger Delta region.

Commenting on the presidential directive, a seasoned environmentalist and field officer of Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN), Alagoa Morris, told BD Sunday that the directive would surely raise the hope of victims.

He recalled that the late President Shehu Shagari had ordered the provision of shoreline protection when he visited Sangana community to assess the damage caused by oil spillage his time in office over four decades ago.

But Morris explained that the shoreline protection contract that was awarded several years later by the NDDC was not executed up to 20 percent completion before it was abandoned by the contractor.

He said: "Sadly, even the shoreline protection contract awarded years after by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was abandoned without doing up to 20 percent of the job. The project has remained abandoned till date."

"Interestingly, following the very recent ocean surge in Sangana and the cries for help that it evoked, including the matter being raised on the floor of the House of Representatives, a presidential directive prompted the management of the NDDC to visit Sangana with some relief materials on Saturday, 23rd March, 2024."

On the presidential directive, Morris stated: "Such a pronouncement would surely raise hope of victims", but pointed out that until the needed action was taken the situation remained a threat.

"However, the threat posed by coastal erosion remains until the needed action is taken. This is why, the NDDC should not only match pronouncements with desirable actions, but also not to delay action," he noted.

Morris commended the NDDC for the visit and the promise by the managing director that the interventionist agency that it would use the most modern and suitable method to without delay address the erosion menace.

He said that the river bank erosion and coastal erosion have increasingly become major ecological threats to most communities in the state, but without any effective action by relevant state or federal agencies to address the menace.



NDDC MD, Samuel Ogbuku presenting the relief materials to Sangana community.

The Worshipper

Pope Francis prays for people slain in war

...Renews appeal for ceasefire in Gaza

Stories by
SEYI JOHN SALAU

Pope Francis has prayed for people slain in war across the world, just as he renewed his appeal for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. He also called for tireless efforts to end the Israel-Hamas war that has brought untold suffering to the civilian population.

The Pope stated this during his last Wednesday General Audience in the Vatican, while remembering the countless lives lost to Russia's war in Ukraine. "Oleksandr, read the New Testament and the Psalms, and he had underlined in the Book of Psalms, Psalm 129: 'Out of the depths, I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice.' This 23-year-old died in Avdiivka in the war."



Pope Francis

According to the Pope, Oleksandr (Alexander) a 23-year-old soldier left be-

hind a life. "He left behind a life, this is his rosary and his New Testament, which

he read, and with which he prayed."

He further called on the

faithful in St. Peter's Square to join him in observing a moment of silence for those slain across the world. "Thinking of this young man and so many others like him, who have died in this madness of war. War always destroys; let us think of them and pray."

Similarly, reflecting on the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, Pope Francis appealed for an immediate ceasefire in the Strip during his weekly General Audience in the Vatican, lamenting the tragic news that continues to come from the Middle East. "I reiterate my firm request for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip." He expressed his deep regret over the staff members of the World Central Kitchen killed as they distributed humanitarian aid in Gaza, and reassured his prayers for them and their families.

"I renew my appeal for the

exhausted and suffering civilian population to be allowed access to humanitarian aid and for the hostages to be released immediately."

On Tuesday, Israeli airstrikes killed seven aid workers in Gaza, who were delivering food to besieged Palestinians with the US-based charity World Central Kitchen. Those killed included three British nationals, an Australian, a Polish national, an American-Canadian dual citizen, and a Palestinian.

The Pope called for tireless efforts to put an end to this and other wars that continue to bring death and suffering to so many parts of the world. "Let us avoid any irresponsible attempts to escalate the conflict in the region," he said, calling on the faithful to join him in prayer for the silencing of weapons and the return of peace to the world.

The ministry of every Christian is to look out for those in bondage - cleric

Lawrence Oji, a minister with the New Covenant Church, London and coordinator of Saving Hands for Alcoholic and Drug End-Users (SHADE) has called on Nigerian Christians to rekindle their primary ministry of looking out for people in bondage and ensuring their release.

"Clerics must begin to prioritise preaching on the theme of salvation and minimise that of prosperity because many people have not received salvation and are confronted with serious challenges that cannot be compared to material possession.

"Many are in the ministry for self-interest. Pastors should begin to teach people the word of God in line with salvation so that they can have personal encounters with God," Oji stated

during a recent press conference in Lagos.

Oji, who is popularly known as 'Pastor Solution' urged other clerics to focus on the gospel of salvation rather than prosperity. According to him, many clerics preach prosperity, neglecting the challenges people were confronted with.

Speaking on his journey to salvation, Oji disclosed that he wasted over 30 years of his life engaging in hard drugs and later got into depression while seeking solutions to his addiction. "I was always giving out drugs to people who desired to have them but were not financially buoyant to get. That made me acquire the nickname 'Mr. Solution' then."

According to him, while being addicted to drugs in Italy, he was imprisoned count-

less times. However, his addiction took him to evangelism and the desire to help those currently suffering from drug abuse and depression on the right path of God.

"Peer group influence led me into hard drugs. I also led many people to drugs in Nigeria. My addiction was so bad that I tried going to the hospital to be rescued, but to no avail.

"My mother went to different places to take me out of drugs and she was told my destiny was spiritually tied to drugs. "I am sharing my story so that people in similar situations can be hopeful. Through this, I got depressed and, at a point, stabbed myself so as to die," he stated.

He disclosed further that God intervened in his case on March 21, 2001, after being prayed for by one of the prison ministers at the highest prison in Italy. "At this point, the authorities were already tired of me; my name was among those to be deported after serving my sentence.

"But, somehow, God intervened and I was not deported as planned. People should not give up on their loved ones. They should rather pray for them and preach to them to be free from every bondage.

"Now, I go to prisons across the world to preach salvation. I also go to places that are abodes of drug addicts. I make sure they are delivered. So, clerics should do more," Oji stated.



Christians urged to witness hope to Nigerians in despair

Nigerian Christians have been urged to look beyond the current economic reality in their bid to witness hope to the world in despair amid socio-economic challenges.

"Our duty is to somehow make people feel the earth shaking event of Jesus rising from the dead, that after the great wickedness and injustice of Good Friday, God made Easter Sunday to occur. We need to make people see that the same is possible in their condition. This is the audacity of hope in Nigeria," Emmanuel Badejo, Catholic bishop of Oyo diocese, stated in his Easter message.

According to him, Christians must help people realise that the suffering of a just man, just like Jesus suffered on the cross, is far from being futile, but always faithful. He stated further that such belief will bring succour and salvation to many currently suffering from their load of sin. "That is the same as saying that the cross Christians carry will always lead to a crown."

The Catholic bishop of Oyo stated further that Christian faithful must find a way of making the mood of Easter reach all the nooks and crannies of their world and environment. "This is where Jesus needs all who feel the resur-



rection joy and life to witness his power and victory.

Does this not mean that all of us Christians have a huge task to reenact the resurrection all around us?

"The resurrection of Jesus means life, joy, victory, freedom, justice, forgiveness, compassion and peace. It means that no situation is too hopeless for God to turn around. Unfortunately, not all of us can feel it," he stated.

According to him, the risen Jesus has conquered sin and death, and is alive. He stated further that Nige-

rians are currently bereaved, deprived, while many are in captivity, sick, hungry and hopeless.

"Jesus is risen; but how much joy can people have when they are under terrorist attacks, bombardment at war or even in the den of kidnapers? What is the meaning of victory and justice for those who cannot afford a decent meal in a day or who, though sick, have no means with which to care for themselves? How can prisoners, destitute and the abandoned feel the power of the resurrection?"

The Worshipper

Every Christian should embrace work as divine

Austin Ukporme



replenish the earth and subdue it.

Considering these instructions, it is clear that God expected the human beings, He made, to work. One of the first engagements between God and the first man, Adam, was God giving him work to do. God told him to take care and guard the garden where God placed him. There was no room for lazing about doing nothing meaningful.

There is a deception among some Christians who have been made to believe that something is wrong with working hard. They believe it is evidence that a person is not blessed. The picture of a blessed man in their head is that of a person who does not work at all but has everything in great abundance.

I have heard people say if God “blesses” them with N100 million or more, they will quit their jobs immediately, stop working altogether and just relax and live on the largesse for the rest of their lives. They believe the only reason for work is to earn money. So, if you have plenty of money, there is no reason to work. This is a lie of the devil.

In Luke chapter 12, Jesus told a parable about a rich man who saved up a lot and decided to retire early and enjoy life. This was his plan - save up plenty of goods, then say to yourself, “I have enough good things stored to last for many years. Rest, eat, drink, and enjoy life!”

That plan displeased God so much that He called the rich man a fool and demanded his soul. The man died the same night that He concluded the plan. What a deadly mentality!

Even though you earn when you work, in most cases, earning is not the reason for work. The reason for work dates back to the beginning, when God instructed man to work to dominate, replenish and subdue the earth. God wanted man to carry on from where He stopped in His work of creation. God is our first model when it comes to working. In the beginning, God initiated the work of creation, implemented it over six days and took a break to rest on the seventh day. That is the example we should follow. We should work diligently and should not forget to take breaks to rest, rejuvenate and get empowered to do more.

The Bible tells us that the Father worked, Jesus worked, and the Holy Ghost is working. He is working through us. The words of Jesus in John chapter 5, verse 17 reveal this. The Jews persecuted Jesus for healing someone on Sabbath day and they were seeking an opportunity to kill Him - But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”

There is nothing wrong with working. God works, and He expects us to work too, with all diligence. Work is divine. Christians should embrace it

wholeheartedly.

Apostle Paul gave a powerful admonition to Christian workers in Colossians chapter 3, verses 23 and 24: “Whatever may be your task, work at it heartily (from the soul), as [something done] for the Lord and not for men, knowing [with all certainty] that it is from the Lord [and not from men] that you will receive the inheritance which is your [real] reward. [The One Whom] you are actually serving [is] the Lord Christ (the Messiah).”

When you work and engage in productive activities, you give God the ground to bless you. Working is giving God the opportunity to bless you. The Bible says that God will bless the works of your hands. So, you can go to God and say “This is what I do for a living, bless it, Lord” and He will.

Also, in Second Thessalonians chapter 3, verses 6 to 12, Apostle Paul took a strong stand against people who refuse to work but hope to live off the benevolence of others. He said such behaviour is not acceptable among Christians.

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man’s bread for naught; but wrought with

labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.”

For those who truly work but do not earn much, I pray that you will no longer labour in vain. As a prophet, I declare that as every child of God who is putting in the work but is getting little or no results, the barrier is destroyed. You shall receive your due as you continue to work in your field and God will bless the works of your hands in Jesus’ name.

Reverend Ukporme is the Senior Pastor at Remnant Christian Network, Lagos. Raised in Sokoto, northern Nigeria, he was trained in peculiar firebrand evangelism and was ordained as a pastor in 2001. He has experienced countless and diverse workings of the faithfulness of God over two decades and has developed a passion to see God’s will for Nigeria become a reality. He can be reached on +2348060255604.

The term ‘work’ means different things to different people. For some, it is what they do in the office or at home, on the job, in business or ministry. In whatever way, you see it and wherever you do it, work has to do with putting in effort, producing results and creating value.

From the beginning, God intended that human beings should work. While declaring the intention to make humans, God said the plan was for humans to have dominion. Then God blessed the created man and made the following demands - be fruitful,

Amo Farm celebrates Easter, urges Christians to reflect on sacrifices of Jesus

Amo Farm Sieberer Hatchery Limited has extended warm wishes to the Christian communities in Nigeria following this year’s Easter celebration, calling on the faithful to reflect on the life and legacy of Jesus Christ.

Ayoola Oduntan, group managing director, Amo Farm, in his Easter message urged Christians to use the Easter season for introspection. According to him, the firm recognises the importance of values like compassion, dedication, and perseverance; values that resonate deeply during the sacred holiday.



Ayoola Oduntan

“Easter is an opportunity to reflect on the principles that guide us – principles of kindness, service to others, and a commitment to building a better future. These values are essential not only in faith, but also in fostering a thriving community,” Oduntan stated, disclosing that Amo Farm is dedicated to fostering positive change within the agricultural sector.

Ito Awala-Ale, business development manager, Amo Farm, stated that the firm takes pride in its dedication to agricultural innovation, and the Noiler bird, a revolutionary product born from years of research that exemplifies its commitment.

According to her, Amo Farm invites everyone to celebrate Easter with loved ones and create joyful memories. “A joyous spirit is at the heart of any celebration. The Noiler offers a healthier and more sustainable way to raise poultry for families and communities.”

According to her, Amo Farm is a leading innovator in the Nigerian agricultural sector through dedication to research and development.

“This innovation, along with our focus on empowering women in rural areas, demonstrates our commitment to building a stronger future for all,” Awala-Ale stated.

NEWS

NiMet, LIFE-ND sensitise Abia farmers on 2024 weather prediction

FAVOUR OKPALE

The Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprise for Niger Delta (LIFE-ND) in collaboration with the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet), has trained 100 farmers on the 2024 Seasonal Climate Prediction in Abia.

The one-day training, which held in Umuahia, had participants drawn from Abia, Delta and Cross River states.

The Abia State Coordinator of LIFE-ND, Uchenna Onyeizu, said the objective of the training was to inform the farmers of possible climatic conditions, which might take place during the year.

Onyeizu, who said that most farmers operate without clear knowledge of weather and climatic conditions, said the information will help farmers make informed decisions.

He said: “This is a high-level interactive session for our beneficiaries, where we have representatives in different communities that LIFE-ND is very active.

“Our experts from the Federal Ministry of Environment have been able to bring out the map of Abia and show the different climatic conditions in terms of total rainfall and how it is distributed across the various local government areas and communities.”

Haruna Zakari, general manager, Agro-meteorology, NiMet, said the agency had collaborated with LIFE-ND in the past three years in sensitising clusters of farmers across six states in the application of weather and climate information.

Zakari, who is also the Technical Assistant to NiMet Director-General and CEO, Charles Anosike, said that the farmers were expected to use the information to reduce the risk in their farming chain activities as well as improve their productivity.

“We do this seasonal climate prediction as an early warning tool, giving out information to all sectors in the country, especially agriculture, which is one of the focal points of the government.

“It is actually for people to plan, given a foresight of what is going to be the outlook of the season from

January to December, to increase food security,” Zakari said.

Bemigho Wategire, LIFE-ND National Officer for Environment and Climate Change, said the training involved cropping calendar and livestock. Wategire said the participants were expected to go back to their various communities and step down what they learnt to other farmers.

Abia LIFE-ND Environment and Climate Change Specialist, Chidozie Kanu, said it was a training-trainers technical support for the participants.

Kanu said that the agency had also put in place a monitoring mechanism to ensure that its efforts were not in vain.

“Beyond this, we support our beneficiaries with gadgets, such as weather station, to help them see the temperature reading for the day and know if it will rain or not,” he said.

LIFE-ND is sponsored by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, in collaboration with the Federal Government, to boost agricultural production in the Niger Delta.

Bliss with Nonye Ben-Nwankwo

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Why I produced Freeman – Daro Umaigba

DARO Umaigba, the co-producer of the Showmax Original documentary series Freeman, has said it was important to tell the story of the Igbo Apprenticeship System, thus the reason behind the series.

In a recent chat, Umaigba said he has always believed the media and film have an important role to play in shaping the narrative of a particular people.

"The Igbo Apprenticeship System is such a brilliant system. In fact, I call it African Innovation in Business Education; something that has changed an enormous number of people's lives. It was a story worth telling. So I had to use this opportunity to tell that beautiful narrative of Nigeria and Africa."

Talking about how he selected the people he featured in the series, Umaigba said he was privileged to have access to the right people.

"There are so many more stories we would have loved to tell, there are so many people we would have loved to include, there are many more places that we would have loved to go, but at the end of the day, it boiled down to who gave us access to share their own story, and the people whose stories we found



very compelling," he said.

In the series, Umaigba said that there were stories that stood out for him.

"I would like to just honourably mention Dr. Cosmas Maduka. His life is nothing short of a movie. Every year of his life, there was just something that is the stuff of a full feature-length movie. Another person that I will not fail to mention is Mr. Anene Okeke, because he is the one person that really gave us access into his life as it was happening in

real time. He gave us access to all his boys currently going through the Apprenticeship System; he gave us access to his home to learn more about his personal life."

Talking about challenges he faced while shooting the documentary, Umaigba said he would not really see them as challenges.

"I think even the challenges did not look like challenges because we had such a great team. My partner and fellow executive producer, Il-

Bliss, was just a rock. He was always there to fill in the times where I nearly lost my mind. Being both executive producer and director at times is a lot to take on. The rest of my team also, associate producer, production manager, cinematographers, editors, everybody was so hands-on that every challenge looked surmountable. We just dealt with them as they came. There were the obvious challenges of finance and time, because it hasn't been a fantastic time economically in Nigeria, and a project of this magnitude involved a lot of travel. God saved us on this project because prices, especially logistics, airfare and transportation, were changing and we had quite a few places to go to. God saw us through."

Umaigba also said he learnt so many things from the documentary.

"One of the biggest lessons is that Africa's wealth doesn't lie in the ground anymore - I don't think the strength and excellence of who we are is in our natural resources. I think it's in the people. The wealth of Africa now lies in the brilliance and the heart of Nigerians, of Africans. That's one of the biggest lessons I'm learning from here, because just imagine what people were able to do from just sheer innovation."

Why Nathaniel Bassey petitioned police – Counsels

Nathaniel Bassey's lawyers, Peter Abraham, Uche Mathew and Anthony Abia have given reasons the gospel singer petitioned the police over the allegation that he fathered Mercy Chinwo's son.

Last week, four social media users alleged that Bassey fathered the son of the popular gospel singer, an allegation that went viral on X.

"We went to the authorities to submit a petition on behalf of our client, Pastor Nathaniel Bassey. The petition is against one Mr Okoronkwo Ejike, Kingsley Ibeh and two others," said one of the counsels, Abraham.

In his own remarks, one of the counsels, Mathew, said it's high time people realised it was criminal to stay "behind the camera" and defame people.

"We need to educate our people. You cannot catch cruise with someone's hard earned reputation. In fact, the law doesn't understand what a cruise is. You have criminally defamed somebody. You cannot hide behind a camera and defame somebody. One of them even posted the picture of our client and said, "This is the real father of the baby". In this instance, this person made a categorical statement, which is in violation of what the law stands for."

The petition in parts reads: "Our client is a gospel music minister whose songs and ministrations have impacted the lives of so many from different walks of life across the globe.

"On Friday, the 29th day of March 2024, Mercy Chinwo Blessed another popular gospel music minister, and her husband posted pictures of their son and themselves on different social media platforms.

"However, our client was disheartened, saddened, and grossly disturbed to find that the above-mentioned sus-



pects, as mischief makers with a criminal intent to destroy the image and character of our client, had made different social media posts of defamatory matter, calling our client 'the father of minister Mercy Chinwo Blessed's son,' a woman who is married to another man.

"The post by Mr. Okoronkwo Ejike has since gone viral on the platform. In reaction to the post, Mr. Kingsley Ibeh commented on Mr. Okoronkwo's post with a picture of our client with the caption "The real father of the baby."

"In a post on the platform "X" formerly known as Twitter, "Dj SpoiltKid" a verified X user, quoted the statement by Okoronkwo Ejike along with a screenshot of the post and added, "When are we doing DNA test?"

"In another post, Mr. Terrence Ekot, on the platform "X" made a post thus: "Take a look at the stunning resemblance of mercy chinwo's son and Nathaniel Bassey. Though duo has been working together on several projects in the past... what do you have to say?"

The lawyers said they wanted the police to investigate this matter and bring the culprits to book.

"The police know the law and they know what the law says about defamation."

Stephanie Okereke lands Excellence award

Popular Nollywood actress, Stephanie Okereke Linus has been awarded the prestigious Lennox K. Black International Prize for Excellence in Medicine by Thomas Jefferson University.

This remarkable achievement highlights her dedication to societal well-being and marks her as the first Black recipient of this distinguished award.

Stephanie, renowned for her activism and impactful work in areas concerning women's health and rights, including her efforts to combat issues like fistula and gender-based violence, has been instrumental in bringing about social change through her films and campaigns.

Reacting to this latest development, the actress thanked the University for the Recognition while saying it would push her to contribute more to the society.

"This honour is not only a recognition of my journey but a celebration of our collective efforts in activism and making a tangible social impact. It's a reminder that together, we can confront challenges, spark significant changes, and heal communities. This award belongs to each of you who has supported, believed, and walked this path with me. Let's continue to use our voices and actions to improve society."

The Lennox K. Black International Prize for Excellence in Medicine is a prestigious accolade awarded by Thomas Jefferson University, recognising individuals who have made significant contributions to the medical field, promoting scientific discovery and advancements.

On receiving the award, Linus reaffirmed her commitment to using her platform for



social good.

"This recognition goes beyond me; it is for all the women and girls out there who are fighting for a healthier, safer world. It amplifies our message and our work. It strengthens my resolve to continue advocating for gender equality, social justice, and improved maternal and reproductive health in Africa."

Susan C. Aldunge, Interim President of Thomas Jefferson University, expressed her admiration, saying, "It was our honour to recognise the remarkable contributions you've made as an advocate for gender equality and social justice. Congratulations once more on this well-deserved award and the acknowledgment of your efforts."

NB Plc takes Big Weekend Experience to Onitsha

NIGERIAN Breweries, has hosted the second edition of the "Big Weekend Experience" across three cities simultaneously - Onitsha, Warri, and Akure.

The event as filled with fun, featuring Nigerian Breweries' top brands, live musical performances, and the opportunity to win fantastic prizes.

Kicking off at 2 pm in



each city, beer lovers had a thrilling day filled with good vibes, great music, cold beer, and the chance to win incredible prizes.

Additionally, attendees sampled the full range of Nigerian Breweries' portfolio, which includes the newest addition, the bold and exciting Legend Twist.

Mfon Bassey, the National Trade Marketing Manager at Nigerian Breweries Plc,

expressed great enthusiasm for the events.

"We're tremendously excited to taking our 'Big Weekend Experience' to the next level this year, starting with huge parties in three cities on Easter Sunday. The Big Weekend Experience is our way of creating memorable experiences for our consumers and thanking them for their unwavering support and loyalty over the years."

Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards holds in July

NICKELODEON has set the date and venue for its highly anticipated annual slime-fest, Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards 2024, to broadcast on Wednesday, July 17, on Nickelodeon Channel 305 on DSTV and Channel 62 on GOtv. The show marks its return in over a decade to Pauley Pavilion on the campus of UCLA in Los Angeles, Calif., and will celebrate kids' favourites from across movies, television, music and sports.

To coincide with Nick-

elodeon Kids' Choice Awards 2024, this July also marks the milestone 25th anniversary of the Emmy Award-Winning SpongeBob SquarePants, a year-long global celebration that will honor the beloved franchise.

"This summer, Nickelodeon will celebrate two of its biggest and most beloved franchises--the 'KCAs' and SpongeBob SquarePants. Celebrating both in July creates incredible opportunities for both properties that win on every platform."

Entertainment

Make Music Lagos: Building a global community of creatives for impact

SEYI JOHN SALAU

With an estimated \$14.82 billion revenue growth in 2025, up from \$4 billion revenue recorded in 2013, the Nigerian entertainment industry is the next revenue driver waiting to happen for the country.

The projections indicate a 16.5 percent Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) in revenue over the next five years, according to a recent report by the Nigerian Entertainment Conference (NECLive).

This growth is attributed to various factors, including the rising internet accessibility among mobile users, with an expected increase from 54 million to 78 million subscribers within this timeframe.

However, the growth is also made possible by the growing numbers of content by creatives across the country. It was on the back of this that a non-governmental organisation, Make Music Lagos, organised its maiden edition of the Make Music Lagos Townhall to sensitise up-and-coming artistes.

The town hall also offered an opportunity for other professionals involved in the entertainment industry on the challenges and expectations, and how to manage their expectations in relation to other professionals in the ecosystem.

Held at the Alliance

Francaise, the town hall was organised to set the tone ahead of this year's World Music Day, scheduled for June 12. This paradigm shift highlights that music is not merely an art form but a substantial source of revenue.

"One of the things Nigeria is not lacking is talent," Adeola Akinyemi, the project lead for Make Music Lagos, said prepping the participants for the panel session.

Themed, 'Building a Supportive and Collaborative Music Ecosystem,' Akinyemi said the town hall offers song writers, singers, producers and others along the value chain an opportunity to collaborate.

Speaking to other initiatives of the Make Music Lagos 2024, Akinyemi said that this year's edition of the annual music festival will include global song exchange that provides Nigerian creatives an opportunity to collaborate with artists across the globe, with 'my song is your song'.

According to her, activities for the 6-day event will commence with the Pop-Up Worship, a gospel music concert of June 16, and will conclude on June 21 with the Shutdown Concert, which is the finale of the event with a large band for mass appeal.

However, other activities lined up for the global music festival includes Music Business Conference (music masterclass), New Music Marathon, which is a Nige-



rian initiative introduced to the global Make Music initiative, and independent concerts to be held across Nigeria in commemoration of World Music Day 2024.

According to Akinyemi, the 'my song is your song' initiative allows artists across the globe to swap songs among themselves, which she said has led to a number of collaborations among artists from Nigeria and other places.

She also disclosed that the new music marathon will allow radio stations to play songs by artists who have been part of the Make Music Lagos' efforts for at

least one hour on World Music Day.

Triumph Grandeur, a Nigerian record producer, known professionally as 'Tyrone' told the participants that artists should know how to craft a compelling story. According to him, artists must learn to create a strategic timeline, maximise distribution channels and measure their success.

"An artist should not cause people to feel indifferent about him or her. Also, make your story relatable, build a strong visual identity and be consistent in it. You must also create," Tyrone said.

rono said.

During the panel discussion, the panelists Tochukwu Macfoy (Dr. Foy), CEO, Energize Music, Amanda Uzoagba, head of licensing West Africa at Mdundo, Patrick Onwuegbu, founder, Loud Behaviour, and Sola 'Schullzz' Mogaji, who moderated the section; all spoke on the need for collaboration in the music industry, and admonished participants on issues relating to attitude, contracts signing, how to follow through with their passion and general conduct while relating with others.

According to Macfoy, it takes a community to make music. He said further that artists have to genuinely care for the industry. "I know that without stepping out, sacrificing for a generation; nothing gonna happen," he said.

According to him, the future of music is all about content and that is where the world is heading to. He said most of the up and coming artists do not understand the basis of the industry, same for making music. "Every big executive wants talent, but they want to put money on someone that can give them 360; so, content has to be 360," he said.

Macfoy also disclosed that female artists in the music industry have a window of opportunity to

leverage in the next three years, as the world is looking towards supporting female artists in the industry.

Another panelist, Uzoagba in corroborating Macfoy's position said that talent is not enough in making good music. "You can be very talented and just die in your bedroom. An artist can't do it alone," she said, "hence there is a need to understand the ecosystem."

Uzoagba, who is an entertainment lawyer, disclosed that over the years entertainment law has evolved, however artists still do not understand the need to work with lawyers, especially in relation to contract signing with music labels. "You can't go through your career without engaging a lawyer."

Another panelist, Onwuegbu, spoke from the audience's perspective. According to him, artists do not really have to be good at making music. He said artists need to understand the need to create consistent perception and brand.

He urged the participants and other up and coming artists to understand the importance of building credible brands. He further advises young creatives that they should know how to create the perception they want with the audience, and flow with it. "Rebranding is the hardest," he said.



L-R: Sola 'Schullzz' Mogaji (moderator); Patrick Onwuegbu, founder, Loud Behaviour; Amanda Uzoagba, head of licensing West Africa at Mdundo, and Tochukwu Macfoy (Dr. Foy), CEO, Energize Music, during the panel discussion of the Make Music Lagos Townhall, held recently at the Alliance Francaise in Ikoyi, Lagos.

Fashion Talk

Air Peace's cabin crew's traditional Isi Agu attire excites Nigerians

CHIGOZIRIM ENYINNA

Air Peace, Nigeria's leading airline made waves in the aviation industry recently with a bold and culturally significant statement. As the airline launched its inaugural Lagos to London flight, the cabin crew members donned the traditional isi agu attire, showcasing the richness and diversity of Nigerian culture at 35,000 feet above ground.

The isi agu attire, characterised by its vibrant, intricate patterns, and symbolic significance, holds a special place in Igbo culture. Traditionally worn during important ceremonies and celebrations, this attire represents heritage, pride, and unity among the Igbo people.

For Air Peace, the decision to incorporate isi agu attire into its cabin crew uniform for the Lagos to London flight can be seen as more than just a fashion statement; it was a celebration of Nigeria's cultural heritage and a nod to the airline's commitment to promoting unity and diversity.

The embroidery on the fabric typically showcases various motifs and symbols that hold cultural significance. These symbols often represent things like wealth, fertility, bravery, prosperity, or ancestral connections. The designs are usually bold and vibrant, adding to the overall regal and distinguished appearance of the attire. To complete the traditional look, accessories such as a coral necklace, beaded waistband, traditional Igbo cap called "okpu agu," and a staff may be added. Air Peace's cabin crew showcased the galore of the outfit with a professional sense of style.

But to this cultural display, a backlash rose in response from fellow Nigerians in question of its meaning; with people going on X to reprimand Allen Onyema for his cabin crew's fashion orientation. Chief Executive officer of Air Peace, Allen Onyema, who spoke with Arise news recently established that Air Peace is saying Nigerian brand, it is Nigerian and it is promoting Nigeria.



Reuben Abati, a television anchor and newspaper columnist of Arise news gave voice in the midst of this backlash. He encouraged a sense of unity rather than tribal attack.

"I have seen that attire before; the one worn by the crew and it is beautiful, pleasant to the eye. And I think the aesthetics of it is what is more important. There is no ethnicity involved in air travel in terms of the way some people are talking about how it is Isi agu. If tomorrow, Air Peace decides to change its uniform, they can even use Aso Oke, they can use whatever from any part of Nigeria," Abati said.

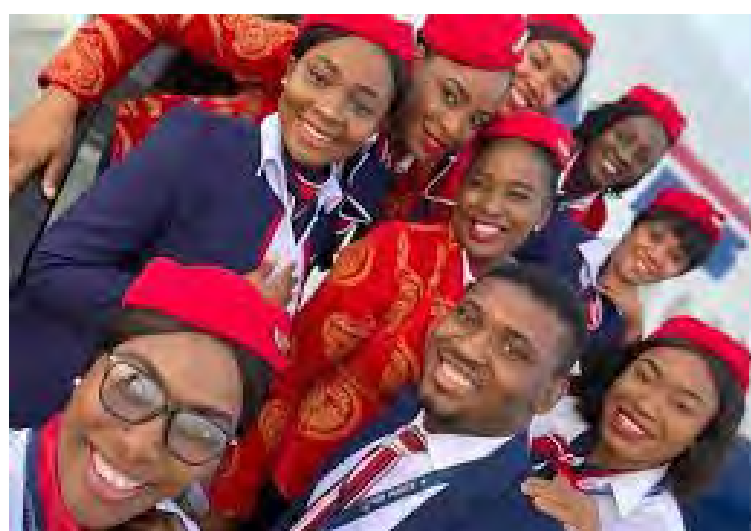
"It is a national brand providing service, to the extent that the airline is also promoting our country's food and attire. We should not reduce it

to a village. Too many people are so provincial in this country, even people in high places, they are extremely provincial. And the matter has been taken to twitter. A lot of ignorant people will say all kinds of things on that platform, when it should be a platform for people to be discerning," Abati said.

Passengers boarding the flight were greeted by cabin crew members adorned in stunning isi agu attire, with its vibrant colours and intricate designs of the traditional attire.

Blessing Ibari, a fashion and hair enthusiast, said to BusinessDay that at the vision of the attire, she was impressed and proud to be called Nigerian.

"Honestly when I saw them, all I could say was AHH, this is good!. All



of them walking in uniform with that outfit is just fantastic."

As the flight took off, passengers were treated to more than just a journey from Lagos to London;

the sight of Air Peace's cabin crew members proudly wearing isi agu attire served as a reminder of the beauty and richness of Nigerian culture.

Travel

Boost for domestic tourism: The Ekiti example

OBINNA EMELIKE

Recently, the Ekiti State Government has been making efforts at harnessing and promoting its huge tourism and creative industry potential.

From partnering Duke of Shomolu Foundation, a theatre production company, to stage 'Fajuyi', an enthralling play, at Ado Ekiti, last year and furthering the initiative with a theatre festival that will take place later this year, among other creative projects, the state is drawing attention to itself.

It has also hosted stakeholders in the tourism industry, especially the Nigerian Association of Tour Operators (NATOP), travel agents, among others.

Again and most importantly, since the concessioning of Ikogosi Warm Springs Resort, its main tourism attraction, to Glocient Hospitality, a subsidiary of Cavitas Group, in 2022, the state has been receiving more visitors at the one-of-its-kind resort.

The resort has also gone ahead to win the Best Holiday Resort in Nigeria for 2023.

It would be recalled that following a 15-year concession awarded by the Ekiti State government to Glocient Hospitality in 2022, the resort, whose history dated back to 1952, entered a new phase of transformation, which has been drawing private, corporate visitors and even government to explore its leisure offerings.

It has also hosted some notable



L-R: Dayo Olujekun, deputy general manager, Glocient Hospitality; Wale Ojo-Lanre, DG, Ekiti State Tourism Bureau, Nura Kangiwa, director general, National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism; Lola Ade-John, minister of Tourism; Dele Odufuye, executive director, Cavista Holdings; Olumide Olayomi, director, government affairs, Cavista Holdings and Lanre Balogun, general manager, Glocient Hospitality, after media parley held in Ekiti State recently.

events since its transformation.

One of such events is the recent Federal Government's Ecogenesis Incubator programme, which is designed to empower residents, tour operators, and guides with essential skills for thriving in the tourism industry.

Speaking at the launch of the programme at Ikogosi, Lola Ade-John, Minister of Tourism, described the Ikogosi Warm Springs Resort and Conference Center as one of the most charming places in Nigeria, and a standout tourist destination.

"I was so impressed when I drove into Ikogosi, the foliage, the green-

ery, the whole place is charming and enticing," Ade-John remarked.

For her, the resort's hiking trails, which she experienced, are adventurous and unique offerings for visitors.

To fully explore the offering at Ikogosi and other hiking destinations in the country, the minister urged Nigerians to embrace hiking clubs.

"Real tourists do not care much about hotels and airports. They want to get to where the action is. It is hiking trails such as this that enable them to connect with the communities in a way that they won't have

anywhere else," she explained.

Underscoring the significance of community stories in tourism, she said that, "Every community, such as Ikogosi, has a story, and we want to share those stories across the land".

The minister also used the Ekiti State Ecogenesis Incubator programme launch to reiterate the government's commitment to partner with the private sector in supporting the growth of tourism at iconic locations such as the Ikogosi Resort, to ensure that they become global tourist hotspots.

But credit goes to Biodun Oye-banji, governor of Ekiti State, who

believes in tourism and is supporting the sector to grow and contribute better to the state's economy.

The governor joined the minister on a tour of the springs on Easter Sunday, while reiterating his commitment to further collaborations that would enable tourism to earn huge revenue for the state.

On his part, Lanre Balogun, general manager, Glocient Hospitality, operators of Ikogosi Resort and Conference Center, expressed gratitude to the federal and state governments for their unwavering support, while highlighting the substantial tourism potential of Nigeria.

He cited the story of Ikogosi since its acquisition by Glocient Hospitality, as a prime example of how tourism can drive economic growth, create employment opportunities, attract foreign investment, while transforming local communities.

"Under the leadership of Niyi John Olajide, our chairman, with the support of the federal and state governments, we will continue to invest in the hospitality sector, creating jobs and adding value to the communities where we operate," Balogun assured.

Ikogosi Warm Springs Resort is a captivating hospitality and tourist destination nestled in the picturesque town of Ikogosi, Ekiti State, southwestern Nigeria. The resort houses the only confluence of warm and cold-water springs in the world, each maintaining its distinct thermal properties as they flow side by side without mixing, making it a truly memorable destination for tourists from Nigeria and abroad.

Travel & Tourism industry set to break all records in 2024, Says WTTC

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) is projecting a record-breaking year for travel and tourism in 2024, with the sector's global economic contribution set to reach an all-time high of \$11.1 trillion.

According to the global tourism body's 2024 Economic Impact Research (EIR), Travel & Tourism will contribute an additional \$770 billion over its previous record, stamping its authority as a global economic powerhouse, generating one in every \$10 worldwide.

As the global sector soars past its pre-pandemic prosperity, WTTC expects 142 countries of 185 analysed will outperform previous national records.

In partnership with Oxford Economic, WTTC's latest EIR showcases a sector brimming with opportunities, underpinning almost 348 million jobs globally. This represents an increase of more than 13.6 million jobs compared to its highest point in 2019.

International visitor spending is expected to come within touching distance of the 2019 peak, to reach \$1.89 trillion, while domestic tourists are forecast to spend more than in any year on record to hit \$5.4 tril-

lion.

A look back on last year

Despite economic uncertainties and geopolitical shake-ups, the Travel & Tourism sector is thriving. With an economic injection of nearly \$10 trillion, the sector matched its pre-pandemic zenith, flexing its resilience and proving its critical role in the global economy.

Representing 9.1 percent of global GDP at just over \$9.9 trillion in 2023, Travel & Tourism's financial footprint was the largest it's been since the golden year of travel in 2019, trailing its peak by a mere 4 percent.

The sector also bolstered its workforce by an additional 27.4 million, propelling the total to nearly 330 million jobs worldwide.

International spending increased by 33.1 percent to reach \$1.63 trillion, underscoring a vibrant comeback story for many countries around the world, with domestic spending increasing by more than 18 percent to reach almost \$5 trillion.

2023 set the stage, demonstrating the unwavering passion for travel, paving the way for a record-breaking year in 2024.

The growth comes despite two of the world's biggest tourism markets

lagging in terms of international visitor spend, with both the U.S. and China seeing a far slower return of international tourist spend.

Last year in the U.S., international visitor spending remained more than a quarter below the peak of 2019, while China's visitor spend remained almost 60 percent down.

Julia Simpson, WTTC president/CEO, said: "Against the backdrop of uncertainty, the Travel & Tourism

sector remains a global economic powerhouse.

"This is not just about breaking records, we are no longer talking about a recovery – this is a story of the sector back at its best after a difficult few years, providing a significant economic boost to countries around the world and supporting millions of jobs.

"There is a risk however, we need the U.S. and Chinese governments

to support their national Travel & Tourism sectors. The U.S. and China will continue to suffer whilst other countries are seeing international visitors return much faster."

Travel & Tourism 10 years from now

Looking ahead, WTTC is forecasting a promising future for the next decade, characterised by robust growth and unparalleled career opportunities.

By 2034, the sector will supercharge the global economy with a staggering \$16 trillion, making up 11.4 percent of the entire economic landscape.

This booming industry is also set to be a job creation juggernaut, providing employment for 449 million people worldwide. Nearly 12.2 percent of the workforce will be powering this vibrant sector, showcasing Travel & Tourism's pivotal role in global employment.

With more than three quarters of the countries analysed expected to exceed the high point of 2019, in terms of GDP contribution,

"Travel & Tourism is on the brink of its most transformative era yet, promising prosperity, innovation, and connection on a scale we have yet to see," WTTC concluded.



Julia Simpson

Arts

Trailing the journey of Chidi Kwubiri, Nigerian master painter

OBINNA EMELIKE

At five years, he had started drawing and painting in his hometown in Umuahia, Abia State. Then, his father did not see anything wrong with the 'childish act' until a few years later when he started school and devoted his time and energy to learning the basic principles of figurative drawing.

It was then the 'concerned' father who wanted him to be a doctor, lawyer or an engineer tried to make him change his choice of career, but he did not compromise his passion for art.

Today, Chidi Kwubiri, a Nigerian German-based visual artist, has no regret for going after his passion. He enjoys a wonderful career with several exhibitions, with a barrage of local and foreign collectors after his works and many awards in recognition of his creative ingenuity as well.

You do not need a visit to his studio, a converted historic steel-mill in Cologne, Germany, to see



Chidi Kwubiri at work in his studio

his works. His creative ingenuity is obvious with his many works in the hands of rich collectors, reputable organisations and museums across the world.

However, his journey to greatness

is intriguing. Recalling when he started painting at age five, the artist, who was born and raised in the village, says art was inborn in him as he had no role model growing up, even had to face the wrath of his father, yet he followed his dream against all odds.

Unlike others who would be carried away by their little success, Kwubiri saw the need to attend a formal art school to further hone his craft despite being a successful young artist with many commissioned works and portraits for a lot of dignitaries in Nigeria to his credit.

In his quest to get new impulses about art and creativity, he traveled to Germany to study Fine Arts (Painting) at the Art Academy Dusseldorf with Michael Buthe and A.R. Penck, both professors, where he bagged Master of Fine Arts Meister-schüler.

Since that very bold move that broadened his worldview and hone his creativity, Kwubiri has had multiple solo exhibitions in Nigeria, USA, Germany, South Africa, France and the Netherlands. Over the years, his works have been shown at the Casablanca Biennale, Morocco, the

"Palm Beach Contemporary", Florida, USA, the UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, Goethe-Institut, Dusseldorf, Germany, OPERA Gallery, Paris and at the 50th Anniversary of the Nigerian Independence at the Nigerian Embassy and Deutsche Bank, Berlin, among others.

The master painter believes that an artist is a naturally born adventurer. But while his adventure has taken him to Germany, the artist does not see himself as a foreigner, he is always home to his root in Nigeria to enjoy his village setting and festivals, which are great sources of inspiration for his work.

"My culture and tradition remain my basic source of inspiration because they keep me strong and boost my creative ingenuity," he explains.

Aside getting inspiration, his constant visits to Nigeria from his base in Germany is also in recognition of the fact that Nigeria is an important art market for him coupled with a growing number of collectors of his works across the country and West Africa.

One thing he does not fail to do anytime he visits is to engage es-

tablished and upcoming artists as his contribution to the evolving art scene. "Don't look at me with probing eyes; I am very active here despite my sojourn abroad. This is my root", he says.

A visit to his studio in Cologne reveals how much he loves space, while the serenading Nigerian music and African-themed decorations tell visitors more about his root.

The spacious studio has also allowed him to do large format paintings, which is a further boost to his creativity. The self-confessed space freak enjoys doing big formats without any challenge because it enhances his dripping techniques.

The artist, who is a recipient of several art sponsorship awards in 1996, 1997, and 2007, has many exhibitions and creative works to his credit. Some of them include; 'Mother Tongue', a body of work that has three distinct layers: his celebrated dripping paint technique on large canvases with bald headed figures engulfed in a sea of paint dots. The second visual layer is his paper and wood based "Writings on the wall", which are abstract pieces that have carefully concealed mask like faces. The final layer of 'Mother Tongue' showcases Kwubiri's politically charged conceptual sculptures that are seemingly comical and intriguing, and on closer scrutiny, deliver a provocative expose of society.

Another outstanding exhibition is 'Wanderlust', which was about the importance of education and at the same time, its fragility, especially for young girls and women in Africa. For him, "Wanderlust" literally means the "lust" to wander and education is one of the most reasons why we all "wandered".

However, with the rate at which medical, law, engineering and other students are abandoning their studies and switching to arts, which was unthinkable few years ago, Kwubiri concludes that the creative wave has hit Nigeria and many are ready to ride along with as the world's next greatest artists are going to be Nigerians.



MultiChoice unveils Nigerian Idol judges

...Season 9 to premiere April 21

MultiChoice Nigeria has unveiled a new panel of judges and announced the dates for the premiere of the 9th season of Africa's most prestigious music talent show, the Nigerian Idol. The trio of Omawumi, Ric Hassani, and 9ice will be judging contestants at the highly anticipated Season 9.

Omawumi, a guest judge on the Nigerian Idol panel in season 7 of the show, is set to bring the value of her illustrious career, spanning over a decade, to bear as a judge in the ninth season of the show. She will be joined by internationally acclaimed artiste, Ric Hassani, a first time judge who is poised to share his invaluable insights and expe-

riences with contestants, empowering them to embrace their individuality and pursue their dreams fearlessly.

Completing the trio is 9ice, a trailblazing artist renowned for his masterful storytelling and timeless hits in Yoruba language. With a career spanning over two decades, 9ice is keen to bring his wealth of knowledge and perspective to the table as a judge, offering contestants a glimpse into the intricacies of the music industry.

Busola Tejumola, executive head, Content and Channels: West Africa, MultiChoice, also shared her thoughts on the upcoming season.

"Nigerian Idol has continuous-

ly set the standard for music talent shows in Africa, and Season 9 promises to be no exception. With Omawumi, Ric Hassani, and 9ice on board, viewers can expect unparalleled talent, excitement, and entertainment. We are proud to showcase the immense musical prowess that Nigeria has to offer and look forward to another unforgettable season," she said.

Commenting on the exciting lineup, as a co-headline sponsor, Milen Oyinlola PR & Media manager, TECNO Mobile, expressed her enthusiasm to work with the judges to help in making the dreams of talented Nigerians come to life.

"TECNO envisions unlocking new possibilities for contestants

and viewers alike. Through this collaboration, TECNO aims to leverage its innovative products and digital platforms to enhance the overall experience for Nigerian Idol enthusiasts. From engaging digital campaigns to exclusive behind-the-scenes content, TECNO is set to weave a tapestry of excitement around the show, amplifying each participant's journey," Oyinlola said.

Bigi Drinks, carbonated beverage brand, shared excitement for the new season.

"We are passionate about nurturing talent and creativity. Witnessing the journeys of these young artists as they chase their dreams fills us with immense joy. We believe in the

power of dreams, and Nigerian Idol provides a platform for these aspiring singers to showcase their talent and be inspired by some of Nigeria's brightest musical stars. We can't wait to see the incredible talent that will take the stage this season. We are confident that Omawumi, Ric Hassani, and 9ice as the judges will elevate the show to greater heights. We cannot wait to see the amazing talent that will grace the stage," the company said.

Nigerian Idol Season 9, with its theme "Let Your Dreams Take Flight", is set to premiere on April 21, 2024 at 7pm on all Africa Magic Channels - Showcase (DStv ch. 151, GOtv ch. 12), and Family (DStv ch. 154, GOtv ch. 2).

Economy

Food prices remain high despite steep decline in forex

A common cry amongst Nigeria, is the current hike in the prices of food and agricultural commodities. While many traders have blamed the high costs on the rise of the dollar, prices have remained high amidst forex decline. RUTH TENE NATSA, writes on the many factors responsible for these:

A disturbing factor, amidst the fluctuating forex market is the escalation of prices of food commodities which retailers always blame on the increasing dollar rates, while consumers complain and, in several cases, simply accept as the norm.

However, it is important to note that while the recent horrendous rise in the dollar had led to a heavy increase in the cost of food commodities, several factors can actually be blamed and must be addressed to help alleviate the rising cost of food commodities.

It is no longer news that the dollar which had risen to an all-time high of N1,600, with speculators suggesting it would get to as high as two thousand naira to a \$1, had to swallow their speculations, as the naira steadily gained and has hovered around one thousand two hundred-one thousand three hundred in the past week.

The instability of the naira was such that major stores and malls, were refusing to paste prices on their shelves, as customers would pick up products/produce and at the pay point/cashier's desk will find the prices had tripled or been changed.

This instability further informed retailers, hiking prices indiscriminately as, the public outcry by consumers forced producers to defend themselves and subsequently publicly disclose their off-taker rates.

Aside the fluctuating forex market, is the tragedy of the killer herdsmen/unknown gunmen, known to attack farming villages and communities, most particularly in food producing states, such as Benue, Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara. These is totally not adding the regular re-occurring communal disputes, political and other security challenges known to affect other communities.

It is no longer news that in some communities in Kaduna and Zamfara states respectively, the people are forced to pay huge amounts weekly, to kidnappers or risk being kidnapped and paying huge ransoms to be freed or killed.

The high cost of fuel and ultimately transportation, is also another factor that has influenced rising cost of



food commodities across Nigeria, but most particularly in the FCT, which mostly has its food imported from other states.

This reality has totally rejected the idea of price control, as farmers, retailers and transporters argue the justification of government to impose price control, when there is little or no subsidy to support their production.

It is also no longer news that as Nigeria strived to promote locally grown products, the border closure no doubt formed a major challenge as farmers of local produces, such as rice rather than become cheaper and more affordable, hiked prices, further adding to the high cost in food commodities.

Again, just recently, Nigeria witnessed the new electricity tariff hike, and there is no doubting the fact that these will subsequently have an effect on suppliers of frozen foods and even non frozen foods.

The climate effect on agriculture is another effect that Nigeria, cannot

deny, as high/low rains continue to affect farmers, flooding and other natural disasters take grueling effects, leading farmers to great losses.

However, the most obvious and generally agreed cause of rising cost of commodities, remains greed. There is no doubting the fact that most retailers, in the rush to make quick gains are more concerned about their profit margin as against the consensual fair price margin.

For many retailers, the choice, between small gains for larger sales will always be rejected as they prefer to make huge profits for lesser sales. This sadly remains the reality of the Nigeria's commodity market.

Meanwhile, responding to the question on why prices are still high despite, the rise of the naira, President, All Farmers Association, Architect Kabiru Ibrahim says

"The farmers are as surprised as everyone that the food inflation is still higher than the general inflationary trend in the country,

because they mostly sell at the farm gate at reasonable prices.

"The middlemen who buy from them and sell to the public are responsible for the hike in prices. They generally attribute the price hike to handling and transportation and of course their margins of profit", he alleged.

He maintained that "As the Naira continues to firm up, I believe prices will appreciably come down to the gratitude of the majority of Nigerians"

In the case of Aboi Kaduma, a farmer from Kachia, "We can only stay in the farm between 8-10am now. We cannot go earlier because of the security situation here. Go out too early and herdsmen and unknown gun men can waste (kill) you, and by 10 the scorching sun is roasting and weakening us."

It is sad that despite the outcries by citizens, Kaduna state continues to witness terrible attacks by so-called bandits. So, the little we are able to produce, we use it to sustain our families. Prices, will remain high, until the security situation is tackled'

For Madam Chinwe (Surname withheld), a trader in the Dutse market in Abuja "The cost of bringing in fresh food into Abuja is high. It is also very risky transporting food across Nigeria. The transporters risk their lives daily, from being kidnapped to being killed, and so when they are able to successfully deliver, they charge for surviving the risks" she added

For Collins Nwegbu, a father of two, the present economy is no one's friend, and he has decided certain foods are luxuries that can be done without.

"In this economy, we eat to survive. The economy taught me that

we do not need three square meals anymore. We eat breakfast by 11 and have lunch about 4-5, that takes care of the day's meal.

Rita Olowo, a civil servant who believes the dollar has no effect on the cost of everyday commodities argues the reason for the high cost of commodities remains greed "most Nigerians are just greedy and wanting to take advantage of everything, using the excuse of the hiking dollar as a reason' is the opinion of.

"Which one concern dollar with poor farmer wey dey farm for her backyard? We do not buy seedlings with dollars; we do not transport with dollar. Don't even tell me about transport cost. Yes, transport is high, but we still do not buy the day-to-day fuel with dollar" she argues.

In addressing the myriad challenges promoting high cost of food commodities, many Nigerians have advocated reopening the borders with stringent measures to protect the nation's economy.

Nigerians also believe there is need for government to provide subsidies to farmers and thereby have a level of control, that would ensure some forms of checks and balances on traders/farmers pricing.

The call for security is one that government at all levels must continue to battle, to protect not just lives and properties but also promote food security.

Whatever the case maybe, there is no denying that the high cost of food commodities has become a worrisome situation, considering that food forms one of the three basic human needs (food, clothing and shelter) and as such, solutions must be found to avert the looming disasters that may occur if not presently tackled.



Food & Beverage



Ayo Oyoze Bajé

Do you want to live long? Go for these food items

Researches carried out by a team headed by Dr. Casey Rebholz, associate professor of epidemiology, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, Maryland on over 10,000 middle-aged people from 1987-2016 show that eating diet that is rich in dark green, leafy vegetables, nuts, whole grains, fruits, legumes but fewer animal sources lead to long life.

In fact, Mediterranean diet have been identified to lead to long life. This is because they are made up mainly of olive oil, fish, whole wheat grains, fruits and vegetables taken every day.

They are packed full of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory nutrients that are effective against diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer and obesity.

Experts on human nutrition advise that we should go for SEA FOODS for all-round health. Fish, crayfish, crabs, prawns are rich in minerals such as iodine, zinc, potassium as well as Omega-3 fatty acids that build the body and the eye's retina. They also possess Vitamin B and Protein.

They are low in fat (2%) and cholesterol and good for those who want to slim down or watch their weight. Let us narrow it down to food items that take good care of some of our health challenges.

Foods against ANXIETY:

- With attempts to meet our dreams and targets for the New Year, many people will become victims of anxiety and stress.

- If these persist, they could lead to ill health characterized by irritability, tightening of chest muscles, difficulty in breathing and lack of quality sleep.

- Food items that are recommended as effective against anxiety include eggs (packed with vitamin d), green tea (antioxidants), dark chocolate, turmeric pumpkin seeds rich in potassium, dark chocolate that possess flavonoids, oily fish such as sardines, tuna and mackerel that contain beneficial Omega-3 fatty acids.

- Other food items that calm the

nerves are bananas, turmeric, milk, yogurt and egg yolk.

- TO INDUCE SLEEP, take honey at night.

- **Foods that give you more ENERGY:**

- It's that time of the year when many people have burnt out their calories after several activities. These include attendance at parties, meetings and traveling almost on daily basis.

- Eating meals rich in some food materials could revitalize the body and get you ready for the rigours of the tasks ahead.

- So, what are these energy-giving food items? They are bananas (blessed with carbohydrates, potassium and Vitamin B6), sweet potato, oatmeal, avocado, oily fish such as sardines, tuna and mackerel.

- Others include coffee, dark chocolate, beans, yogurt, apples, beet, brown rice, nuts, dark green vegetables, popcorn and wait for this-water!

Foods that cleanse the COLON:

- Did you know that a healthy COLON that allows for free flow of faeces and is also effective against constipation prevents cancer?

- Fibre-rich fruits and vegetables such as apples, orange, banana, pear, peas, beans, legumes, whole grains and wheat are highly recommended.

- Food items that assist you to have GOOD SLEEP are those packed full with several nutrients such as melatonin, tryptophan including minerals especially magnesium that stave off hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, obesity and diabetes.

- These include almond, walnut, turkey, warm milk, chamomile tea, black tea, watermelon, orange juice, banana, dark chocolate and fatty fish.

- Sleep disorder affects your general well-being, so go for the listed foods.

- Ensure that you enjoy between seven to nine hours of quality sleep every night.

- Foods that HEAL the MUSCLES, according to Alina Petre, a renowned

nutritionist are those truly rich in protein, fibre, omega-3 fatty acids and zinc.

- These include meat, fish, poultry, beans, ground nut and walnut. Others are dark green vegetables, fruits such as pawpaw, mango, tomatoes and oranges. Oily fish include sardines, tuna and mackerel fish.

- Not left out are red and yellow bell peppers and calcium-rich milk.

- These nutritious food items are not only recommended for athletes suffering from different injuries but for everyone daily fully engaged in physical activities. Some, out of exertion suffer from muscle ache and pains at the joints.

- As we age, the cells deteriorate and people battle against cataract and dimness of sight. FOODS that HEAL the EYES include green, leafy vegetables, protein-rich eggs, nuts and beans; oranges and other citrus fruits, tuna, salmon, sardines, oysters and pork.

Pomegranates

Cruciferous Vegetables

These are vegetable powerhouses with the unique ability to modify human hormones, activate the body's natural detoxification system and inhibit the growth of cancerous cells. Cruciferous vegetables should be chewed thoroughly or eaten shredded, chopped, juiced or blended in order to release their potent anti-cancer properties.

Salad Greens

Raw, leafy green vegetables – some are cruciferous – contain less than 100 calories per pound, making them an ideal food for weight control. In scientific studies, women who ate a large salad at the beginning of a meal ate fewer calories from the rest of the meal, and larger salads reduced calories more than smaller ones. In addition to keeping weight down, greater intake of salads, leafy greens or raw vegetables is associated with reduced risk of heart

attack, stroke, diabetes and several cancers. Leafy greens are also rich in the essential B-vitamin folate plus lutein and zeaxanthin, carotenoids that protect the eyes from light damage.

Nuts

A high-nutrient source of healthful fats, plant protein, fiber, antioxidants, phytosterols and minerals, nuts are a low-glycemic food that also help reduce the glycemic load of an entire meal, making them an important component for an anti-diabetes diet. Despite their caloric density, nut consumption is associated with lower body weight, potentially due to appetite suppression from heart-healthy components.

Seeds

The nutritional profile of seeds is very similar to nuts in that they provide healthy fats, minerals and antioxidants, but seeds have more protein and are abundant in trace minerals. Flax, chia and hemp seeds are rich in omega-3 fats. Flax, chia and sesame seeds are also rich lignans, breast cancer-fighting phytoestrogens. Sesame seeds are rich in calcium and vitamin E and pumpkin seeds are especially rich in zinc.

Beans

Daily consumption of beans and other legumes helps stabilize blood sugar, reduce your appetite and protect against colon cancer. The most nutrient-dense starch source, beans act as an anti-diabetes and weight-loss food because they are digested slowly, which blunts the rise in blood glucose after a meal and helps prevent food cravings by promoting satiety. They also contain lots of soluble fiber which helps lower cholesterol, and resistant starch which is converted by intestinal bacteria into short-chain fatty acids that help prevent colon cancer

- Simply put, we ALL need these nutrients.

- Go for them!

Ayo Oyoze Bajé is Nigeria's first food technologist to practice as a journalist. ayobaje@yahoo.co.uk; 07068638066

SundayBusiness

Orange Group marks World Health Day with launch of Herbasip

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

In celebration of World Health Day, Orange Group, an innovative fast-moving consumer goods leader, has reaffirmed commitment to advancing health and wellness with the launch of the pocket-friendly immune booster, Herbasip.

This announcement is in alignment with the 2024 World Health Day theme, "My health, my right" which champions the universal right to health, emphasizing the critical need for every person, regardless of location, to access and enjoy a healthy lifestyle.

According to Uchenna Ezenna, the Orange Group Media and Communications Director, "At Orange Group, championing innovative, accessible, and cost-effective healthcare solutions has always been at the core of our mission. With the introduction of Herbasip, we continue our legacy as a trailblazer in health and wellness."

A World Health Organization (WHO) 2020 report reveals a heightened global awareness of health challenges. This includes concerns about

pandemics, antibiotic resistance, the rise of chronic diseases, and the impact of stress on our immune systems.

Adding to this challenge, a 2021 World Bank report highlights the financial burden of healthcare. Even before the pandemic, healthcare

costs pushed over half a billion people into poverty. This situation likely worsened, underlining the critical need for accessible and affordable healthcare solutions.

The most rewarding part to us is the accessibility to the everyday Nigerian, Uchenna Ezenna explained, "It's not just about providing an innovative product, but ensuring that it reaches every corner of Nigeria."

"We aim to break down barriers to health equity, making sure that Herbasip is not only affordable but also easily obtainable for every Nigerian, regardless of their economic or social status."

Enriched with a potent blend of natural herbs, Herbasip is meticulously formulated to bolster the body's defenses against diseases, keeping it resilient and healthy.

Herbasip is affordable and stands as a testament to Orange Group's commitment to making health a priority for everyone, affirming the belief that good health should not be a privilege but a right, in line with the message of World Health Day 2024.



L-R: Uchenna Ezenna - Media and Communications director; Ernest Ezenna, Business Development director, and Anthony Ezenna, Finance director Orange Group.

Society

Concern grows over Nigeria's future with criminal-minded youths

BRIGHT IMOH

Just like every other nation that banks on its youths for a robust and promising future, Nigeria boasts numerous vibrant young individuals who are not only willing, but also strive earnestly to succeed both at home and in the diaspora. They play important roles in enhancing the welfare of the general public, contributing to the wellbeing of people, and impacting the world at large.

However, major concerns have risen overtime regarding the evolving desires of Nigerian youths who are carried away by the economic hardship and crave for better lives through shortcuts.

The desire for immediate wealth without putting in the necessary effort has become the order of the day in the lives of the many young adults and teenagers in Nigeria.

In recent times, this mentality has eaten deep into the society due to a couple of various factors that include: societal pressures, unrealistic expectations fueled by the social media, a perception of systemic corruption, and a lack of understanding of the value of hard work and perseverance, which has led to a developed increase in crime rate.

The success rates of young individuals who engage in criminal activities such as internet fraud (yahoo) has become a source of motivation to other youths who seem to be hard workers for a long period of time without any reality of reaching set goals.

Realistically, Nigerian youths might be on a wrong trajectory, but they are impeccable because humans are only motivated by results, regardless of the processes involved in any form of development or production.

Education was supposed to be one of the major solutions but, with what the youth see in Nigeria, many of them now are being deceived into believing that "education na scam."

This is an unfortunate phrase that has emboldened many to drop out of



Yahoo boys

school or to show total apathy toward anything educational.

They see a typical school drop-out who now seems to be more successful than a degree holder.

After spending many years and spending so much in school, one graduates and spends so many years looking for a job, whereas a school dropout who just got a political appointment becomes an instant millionaire, or those that go into crime making "good" in a short period of time. These are the happenings in today's society that tend to deceive many youths.

Ranging from teenagers in secondary schools to undergraduates in higher institutions, the educational system is now faced with the challenges of students and youngsters who see criminals as their role model thereby affecting their behaviour and psychological approach to life, leading to unnecessary and negative peer pressure.

Kehinde Oluwadare, a creative thinker and a problem-solver on 'The Future of the Nigerian Youth' said via LinkedIn, "The average Nigerian student today is

more interested in auditioning for Big Brother, or attempting Internet Fraud than focusing on studies or working hard to earn a living. From my interactions with these future leaders, they have no sense of direction, no sense of purpose towards a common/greater goal of developing our nation. Their one and only goal - 'Get this money'.

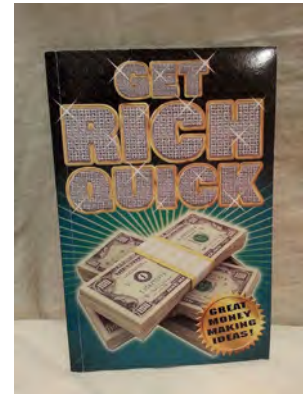
"The Nigerian youth is so uninterested in Nigerian governance and policy issues, and is only informed via social media of happenings around the country. Ask the average youth a question on politics, governance or any such related topics, and yes, you would marvel at the lack of information, but what would baffle you the most is the nonchalance. Now and again when I ask, I would usually get a shrug. Does this mean they're unintelligent? No. Ask the same youth about the latest music, the latest gist, or what's trending, they would go on and on and on."

He further highlighted that one of the major problems he finds is that "we have allowed Social Media to raise our young ones."

According to him, "Social media, while being a great technology breakthrough, could also be a bad tool for the future of our young ones. We let strangers from across the world raise our children, while we are comfortable with the peace and quiet it affords us as parents and older ones.

"I remember growing up, there was no Facebook, no Instagram or Twitter. As such, busy and tired as they were, our parents and the community in general took interest in our development. Now, due to the current day to day challenges we face - work, business or otherwise, we have conveniently left the young ones to be mentored by wolves in sheep's clothing. These wolves, fuelled by their own agenda and ego, have divided opinions and created hatred across social media platforms such as twitter, where followers of Influencers actively battle each other."

Another major challenge the country faces is the decline in the quality of education, and the failure of the educational system to move at par with global



trends and development.

For instance, the average Nigerian student going to further his/her education abroad has to take conversion classes or try to catch up one way or another when he/she resumes overseas.

A young lady studying Mass Communication at a top Federal University in Nigeria said that their curriculum was still based on Newspapers and traditional media in this age of technology.

"Professors still use the same notebooks they used in teaching older generation, and even maybe our parents to teach in this digital age. "Our educational institutions still use the curriculum passed down by colonial masters years ago. The result: Graduates who through no fault of theirs are incompetent and unfit for the job market," he said.

Make no mistake however, the young ones are watching. They see the challenges in the job market, they see the financial troubles their parents are going through, they see that to have massive influence, you need to have money, they see everything, and it all points to one thing - "get this money" and live for yourself.

Speaking with a legal practitioner recently, he said that the ruling elite were responsible for the moral decadence and lack of faith in the country being manifested by the youth of today.

The lawyer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, recalled the last general election in Nigeria, saying that everything about the election had a negative effect on the youth as the handling of the election left many questions in their minds.

"In this country, we saw people passing bribe money

to people to vote for them. We heard about doctoring of their documents which they submitted to the INEC, and the same Commission received such documents and endorsed them. We saw some professors recruited to handle some aspects of the election taking part in the malfeasance that happened. So, the question is, where do you begin to advise the youth to be upright in a country where there seems to be a rat race; where the end justifies the means? It is very tough my dear," he said.

The legal practitioner also said that the high level of poverty occasioned by the ruling class was driving many Nigerians into wrong things.

"We have watched and heard how politicians are enjoying themselves in the midst of the hardship in the country. People are dying; families are going through a lot. To feed is very difficult. People are being pushed to the wall, and the response to that negative push is that people, particularly the youth, are embracing all manner of criminality to break even. It is unfortunate. We must not blame it all on the youth. The political elite have destroyed Nigeria and they are to blame," he said.

A school proprietor told BusinessDay Sunday that a dangerous trend was emerging in Nigeria whereby schools no longer have good teachers.

According to her, many of those who claim to be graduates cannot even make a complete sentence.

"Our eyes have seen a lot. When some of them come seeking employment, they are not coherent. They can't even make a complete reasonable statement. Even at that, they will tell you that they do not want to be on full time. They are in a haste. They want freedom to browse on their big phones. Even those without a job have big iPhones and you wonder where they got the money to acquire all those. Everyone is on a fast lane nowadays. The youth want to be multi-millionaires without working for it. I wonder what future holds for Nigeria," she said.



Youths

Sunday Magazine

From militancy to consultancy: How Niger Delta ex-militants became govt contractors

IGNATIUS CHUKWU (with reports from Mercy Enoch in Asaba AND SAMUEL ESE in Yenagoa)

THE actual number of ex-militants in the Niger Delta is never known but not less than 100 ex-warlords are now big-time government contractors. The journey from the creeks to posh offices took pains and blood.

The decision to include militants (former or present) in contract business did not come by romance. It came in a very hard way: blackmail, threat, sample killing, etc.

One story in the underworld in the Goodluck Jonathan years seems to excite most persons in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) space. The story can never get confirmation from government but the creek boys relish in telling how a N13bn contract was won by a vicious warlord.

The president was to land by helicopter at a spot in Delta State for a maritime institution. A warlord was said to have appeared on the scene and threatened to blow up everybody and everything if his permission was not obtained for the VIP to land.

The gist says everything was said and done but no dice, and the craft continued to hover and eventually went back. After that ugly incident, the name of that particular warlord whose home was bombed twice sent jitters up the spines of the VIP. Soon, the warlord was asked what he wanted, and soon, a juicy contract landed on his laps. He has continued to dictate the pace in the oil region and Delta State to this day.

Many say he is relied upon to maintain peace in Ijaw areas especially Delta and Bayelsa States. Whether such a story is true or not, these tales are consumed wholesale in the creeks and they seem to fuel more bravado in the midst of the creek boys who think they hold the four aces.

The story goes about a formerly cult chief in a part of Rivers State who focused on dictating what happened around the jetties and waters from Port Harcourt via Okrika to Bonny. His boys decide if a ceremony especially burial would hold in the villages or not. Killing was for business, it was said.

By 2009 when the likes of Asari Dokubo who were believed to be Ijaw freedom fighters and militants began to get government recognition for Amnesty, the cult leader was being denied such lofty recognition which required leaders to submit names of their boys for integration into the Amnesty. The leaders were to get the funds for their boys and pay them, too.

This cult leader was said to have threatened everybody saying he alone ensured the killing of up to 2000 persons and should therefore, not be underrated when violence was involved. His voice got attention and he was given the appropriate status that guaranteed flow of funds from the Amnesty Scheme to him and to his boys. Today, he is a top contractor and man in charge of many things for many people.

Amnesty was introduced by the late president, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2009 when oil theft reduced Nigeria's daily crude output to as low as 900,000 bpd. A BusinessDay report those days advised the new government to consider giving roles to the creek boys instead of wasting over 800,000 bpd, and that the revenue from it could pay the boys. That was the reasoning that encouraged the government to realise that amnesty was not a waste of funds but redeployment of wasting resources.

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) which was seen as equivalent to giving pap to babies was not meant to last forever, but for a determined short period, but Yar'Adua died. His successor, Jonathan, was blackmailed into leaving it for some more time because his kinsmen wondered how a northerner could give them something and their own brother would come to stop it. So, Amnesty has continued to stay.

The next issue is pegging the number. It



General Popor Augustine

was envisaged to cover 15,000 militants with N60,000 per month and training, all not exceeding one year. Soon, the number grew to 29,000, and later another 30,000 claimed to be militants too. Today, some say 60,000 persons have been recognised and treated as ex-militants.

The men who run PAP choose to talk of impacted number, putting it at five million.

Havoc in the creeks before PAP came:

Governments did not just float PAP for nothing. August 15, 2005, a Sunday, could be identified as the flag-off day for militancy in the region, at least in Rivers State. Guns began to boom around the Marine Base area of the Garden City and many fled. It was later learnt that young men with guns were demanding for attention.

In about 1999, some young people were being unruly in the Black-Market area of

Yenagoa (Bayelsa State capital). They were said to be boys used by the first civilian governor to run himself to power, and they talked about 'egbesu' power. The boys claimed they were used and dumped and thus came out on the roads to find food; robbing, snatching, raping, etc. The man they claimed commissioned them was abroad with his family for a brief period; some said to allow the bad boys get tired and disperse. It didn't work out that way.

Orders came and the boys were dislodged. They were said to have relocated to Odi near Kaiama town where they increased their nuisance. Police and later army came to stop them but got killed. This led to the inglorious Odi massacre.

This could mark the actual origin of militancy. Soon, it became a widespread slogan that they were fighting for 'Resource Control', a loose term that captured every crime and killing. When the 2005 shooting began in Port

Harcourt, it was understood to be a protest to the sitting governor then, Peter Odili. It grew into a pan-Niger Delta violent agitation and the objective was unified to be war against oil giants.

Growing into government contractors:

Government seems to be the most vulnerable entity around and government contracts seem to be the easiest carrot available to appease aggrieved citizens, no matter what their grievances are. Also, governments in Nigeria seem to believe in one thing, pacification. In the absence of creative programmes and welfare schemes that mop up growing people and deliver opportunities for self-employment and openings, government resorts to pacification.

The havoc they caused before amnesty:

The militants had held sway in the creeks. They had cells and were a menace to members of the



Ex-militants protest

armed forces. They disrupted oil exploitation and exploration. They made marine transport dangerous. They discovered kidnapping and were behind the abduction of oil workers, starting with expatriates. This brought Nigeria's oil capacity to half.

Politics, drugs, cultism jam militancy:

Before militancy, drug barons were quietly controlling things underground. They used the creek routes to create a distribution network. They built cells and armies. For secrecy and trust, cultism was introduced to create fraternity within camps. When politics, came in 1999, the groups soon found new patrons and new uses. The new leaders began to recognise and patronise them.

When each leader won an election, he gave jobs and appointments to the educated ones and contracts to the others. It soon became clear that if you did not have a mob behind you, you would hardly win any position in the oil region. So, violence supported politics and politics supported violence. Over the years, an intricate network of politics, thuggery, cultism and veiled militancy emerged. Now, there is no clear difference between a militant and an ex-militant; a thug and a cultist, etc.

Outstanding ex-warlord or ex-agitators have emerged as successful in their businesses and government contracts, the most outstanding probably Gen Government Oweizide Ekempupolo (Tompolo) whose firm, Tantita, does huge contracts especially in pipeline surveillance and protection with hundreds of boys down the line. Some others from Delta State include 'Gen Augustine U Ogedegbe JP', now a successful general contractor; 'Gen Michael Brakemi', Fineman Kpolotor a.k.a Indiami who has poultry farms and fish ponds; 'Gen Joseph Figbele', 'Gen Ramsay Umu-koro', 'Gen Para Ekiyes', Gen Popor Augustine whose

company, Popor Augustine Global Enterprises, is into agriculture, agro-allied consultancy, general contracts, and merchandise.

Big guns exist in Rivers State. They include Asari Dokubo regarded as a true militant and freedom fighter; HRM Gen Ateke Tom, a businessman and a king in Okochiri, Okrika, 'Great Khali John', Christopher Sogboma, and High Chief Solomon Ndigbara from Ogoni areas.

Bayelsa State has a number of generals or ex-generals too who are now contractors and business leaders: 'Gen Afranus Ukparasia (a.k.a Africa); Victor Ebikabowei (a.k.a Boyloaf), and 'Gen Seleokumo Damigo'. There is also Abraham Ingobere, the incumbent Speaker Bayelsa State House of Assembly, now Speaker for a second term and is in his fourth term in the House representing Brass Constituency. There is Gen Gibson Munalayefa. He represented Ogbia Constituency 3 in the Bayelsa State House of Assembly for two terms (2015 - 2023). There is Gen Reuben Wilson, now Pastor Reuben Wilson who operates a non-governmental organisation, Reuben Initiative for Good Leadership and Accountability (PRIGLA). He campaigned extensively in the run up to the last general election in all the Niger Delta states. There is Victor Ebikabowei (aka Gen Boy Loaf) who has since returned to normal business doing marine transportation.

There is Joshua McIver, who runs a marine transport business. He is into politics and was running mate to former governor and former Minister of State Petroleum Resources, Timipre Sylva, in the last governorship election in the state.

There is Clifford Wilson, trained as a pilot in South Africa after receiving amnesty and served as an appointee on aviation to former governor, Henry Seriake

Dickson. He is a chief and leading figure in Kolokuma 1 representing the community in the KEFFES Development Foundation under the multinational oil company, Chevron.

Voices:

Ambassador Gloria Unukotete, founder and chief executive director, Uri Ladies and Youth Development Initiative, Delta State, said: "As far as I am concerned, the amnesty programme has not met the need for which it was created because somehow, it has been politicised in the sense that it is just revolving around some few persons.

"And even those that are utilising it, I think some don't really need it. It didn't trickle down to the populace. Everybody is not really captured as far as I am concerned. Most of the people approached it from the angle of 'Man Know Man'.

"They didn't do adequate research/survey to find out the real people that need it. Though they have done a lot, so many people have benefited but I still feel it's not fair.

"I know there is a handful of persons in it and they are doing well and are well respected.

"The success rate of the amnesty programme, to me, is 20 per cent. If the programme was meant to put smile on the faces of the Niger Delta Youths, it would have been all-inclusive; because we know that Niger Delta is a place where the money that helps build the nation's economy comes from.

"You discover now that most of our youths

are unemployed despite the fact that we are educated. Outsiders take up our positions in oil companies. Even when it comes for our people to be recommended, our leaders still go out to sell our positions to strangers. Community leaders and traditional rulers, because they are the custodians, they sell the slots of the indigenes.

"I think the purpose of the amnesty programme is to make people of the oil-bearing communities to feel the positive impact of the oil.

"The programme has space for educated militants but I can say my community in Ughelli South LGA, as oil-producing community, don't have a beneficiary there - We have oil wells but the impact of the amnesty is not felt there.

"I think most of the people who did all these things did so in such a way that those who were not part of the affected areas went and buy guns and submitted claiming that they were among, and they were included in the programme. It's just the survival of the fittest of for those who can play smart.

"Due to the way the programme was implemented, restiveness is still very much with us. The programme should be reviewed and the real grassroots people like us partake in the enumeration."

General Popor Augustine, Ojuku Camp Leader and the Coordinator of Urhobo United Ex-Militant Leaders. He is the chief executive officer of Popor Augustine Global Enterprises, said: "To some extent yes, it has brought peace to the Niger Delta region and increase oil production.

"The amnesty programme is a success to some extent because, it has calmed down the agitations and restored relative peace in the Niger delta region. Because of the amnesty program we have trained engineers, technicians among others. We also have Niger delta indigenes going for training in different field of human endeavour. I think to some extent, the amnesty programme has stopped the incessant attacks and sabotage of oil facilities, it has stopped the destruction of lives and properties in the region. I will rate the success of the programme 60 to 70 percent.

"The presidential amnesty programme still has some short-coming. The programme can be improved through: Improved training strategy, coordination, and assessment. There should be advisory board consisting of knowledgeable and civil actors, representatives of the beneficiaries and other stakeholders in the region. The board could provide valuable advice and strategic directions as well as evaluation of the training programmes.

"Secondly, the monthly stipend should be increased to around N150,000, since N65,000 can no longer buy anything in the market in this present economy.

"I wish to use this medium to congratulate the Amnesty new boss, Dennis Otuauro PhD."

Amnesty made a bad situation worse Warri-born Journalist

The media practitioner, who chose to remain anonymous, said: "When Yar'Adua was introduced Amnesty for violent Ijaws, the concept failed to create a corresponding reward, if not more, for peaceful Niger Delta ethnic nations, like my Urhobo, who equally hosts as many oil assets as Ijaw.

"By appeasing only the violent, Goodluck Jonathan who aggravated the ethnic tone to Amnesty gave room for sustained birthing of militant groups as violence became the only language FG understands.

"Save for a few earliest beneficiaries who enjoyed overseas training and got engaged on their area of competence (and the figure so insignificant), Amnesty only benefited the militant leaders and made the followers to be puns in the chess game, perpetual dependants in life.

"The media share in the blame for glorification of the militants as ex-militants or ex-agitators. There is no such thing. Whether Tompolo, Boyloaf, Asari, name them, these people remain militant leaders. They still talk, act, gain recognition as militant leaders. Why would anyone call Asari ex-militant leader when he openly still maintains a private army?"

"If Amnesty is a total failure and exposed the fact that none of the modern day militant leaders took arms against the nation to fight for the common interest of their people, all the arms struggle, kidnapping of expatriates, killing of soldiers, vandalism of oil assets and oil theft were for personal gains and to coerce FG to appease them with their share of the national cake.

"That is why as soon as they get such personal appeasement, the professed agitation for massive transformation of the oil host communities was never realised. Instead, militants are getting multibillion-naira projects and sundry opportunities.

"If Amnesty is not a scam, why is has government duplicated oil assets surveillance contracts and structures in place that makes it the most expensive oil and gas enclave to operate. The huge part of the operating cost has gone into securing assets.

"Tantita and other engaged private bodies. All oil fields accommodate an army of occupation called JTF with mandate to guard oil assets. Local contractors have separate engagement to guard assets in their localities. Navy, Army, Civil Defense have separate mandate to protect assets. It's hard to know who is in-charge of oil assets protection.

"If Amnesty succeeded, why do we still have more armed groups popping up from everywhere, demanding recognition. It is

annoying."

Modular refining licences promised by the FG will conclude amnesty objective - Fyne-face Dumnamene Fyneface of YEAC

He said: "The number of ex- militants that have gone through the Amnesty Programme (AP) of the Federal Government is high. Naming them one by one is difficult, but we know some of those warlords that were granted pardon and integrated into the society with even government contracts such as Government Ekpomo (Tompolo), now a high chief.

"Pipeline contract is helping many of them. Some former warlords in Rivers State are doing well now as monarchs, contractors, leaders, etc including Ateke Tom who is now a royal father in Okochiri, Okrika local council area. There is another high chief, Solomon Ndigbara in Ogoni area. They have boys who are loyal to them and they use them to maintain peace these days.

"Many of them were trained abroad, some got special skills, some remained abroad, while some are in government jobs, some as, in non-government places, some in ventures, etc.

"Amnesty spared them from arrests. But some are still roaming about, earning the N65,000 monthly stipend.

"They can't get full jobs. Also, not all of them got foreign scholarships. Some didn't even get skills.

"Amnesty is somehow a success because it reduced militancy and reduced theft of oil and vandalism in the oil region, but some went back to oil theft and crime.

"Government has not done enough in terms of Amnesty. Not all that are doing contracts have employed their boys. So, those in pipeline vandalism can be mopped up by modular refineries system.

"If the Federal Government can conclude the licensing of modular refineries and give the licences already approved by the Muhammadu Buhari administration for the youths in the Niger Delta, it would solve the issues of restiveness and pollution.

"The Presidency can legalize artisanal refining and revisit the Presidential Artisanal Crude Oil Refining Development Initiative (PACORDI) that was developed by the Youth and Environmental Advocacy Centre (YEAC) in July 17, 2020.

"We cannot say for sure that those granted amnesty are not part of those participating in crude oil vandalism in the Niger Delta. They are almost same people. Let government therefore do what it can to arrest crude oil theft and vandalism in the region.

"If modular refinery licenses can be given, and artisanal refineries can be legalised through the PACORDI suggestion, and if the FG goes ahead to establish the Niger Delta Industrial Park (NDIP) promised by the presidency, most of the youths currently on amnesty pay would be sent to those places, then amnesty budget can focus to other aspects of the Niger Delta.

"Amnesty programme was not designed to become a permanent scheme but because it has failed to meet the objective and because of entrenched interests that would not want it to end, this has continued.

We (YEAC) are building mini solar grids in communities for steady electricity to reduce unemployment that fuels militancy and crude oil vandalism in the oil region. This is our own contribution to the efforts to the militarization of the Niger Delta."

Conclusion:

Guns seem to have failed, bribery through contracts may have failed too. What many point to is sustainable entrepreneurship which modular refinery network can achieve. The FG had gone far with PACORDI, a little push may conclude it and turn the Niger Delta into a hub of refining networks spilling diesel and petroleum to the nation and beyond.



Ex-militants in the creek



Niger Delta militants shooting



Niger Delta former militants

Cover

Dangote's refinery, Onyema's Air Peace hold bright hope for Nigeria's future – Agbakoba

INIOMBONG IWOK

Olisa Agbakoba, a senior advocate of Nigeria (SAN), has said that the Nigerian economy had begun to turn the corner for good.

Agbakoba pointed out that the economic activities of two prominent citizens were responsible for the feat so far recorded.

The Maritime lawyer noted that there may be signals the economy may be turning.

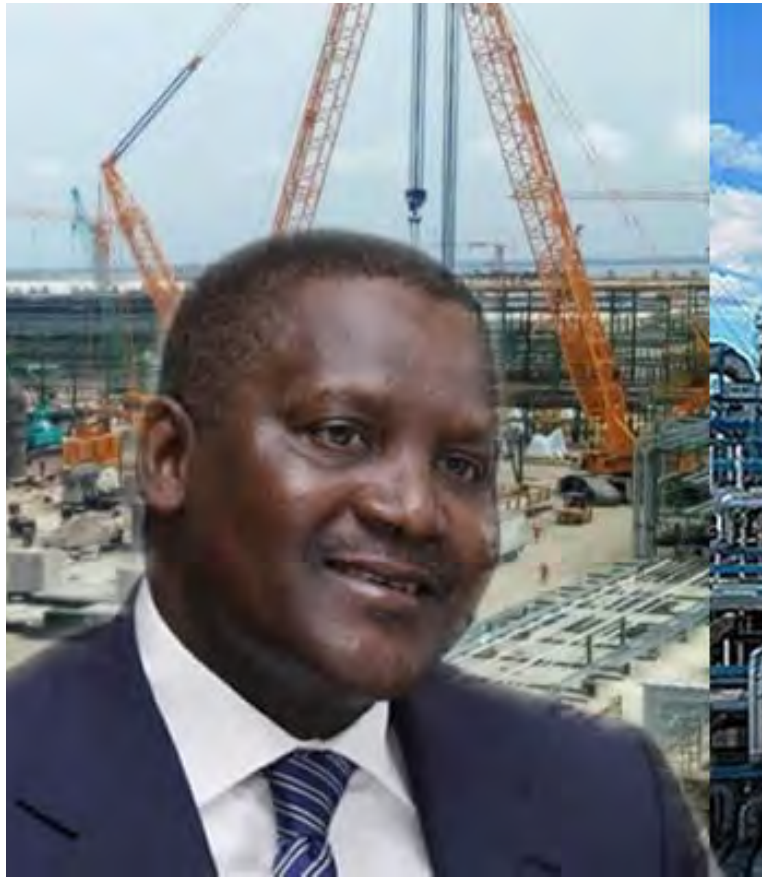
According to him, "Dangote refinery commenced sales of diesel, increasing supply and crashing prices significantly. Diesel prices dropped from about ₦1,700 per litre to around ₦1,350 per litre. This was just by pumping 100 million litres.

"Dangote plans to pump another 100 million litres. Diesel prices may dip below N1000. Dangote announced plans to begin sale of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) by May. This will significantly bring down prices. Experts predict petrol prices to crash by at least 25 percent to N400."

Also noting the positive role Allen Onyema's Air Peace is playing in the aviation industry and the reaction of the forex market to the activities in that space, Agbakoba said: "With the support of Festus Keyamo, minister of Aviation, finally broke through the reciprocity barrier in aviation. Air Peace is now flying to the United Kingdom (UK). Ticket prices monopolised by British Airways and Virgin Atlantic crashed by at least 60percent.

"The forex market reacted to all these. The Naira strengthened against the dollar. Experts suggest the price of the dollar may well fall below ₦1000 in the coming months. If this trend continues, much-needed relief for Nigerians will occur. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) may potentially review the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) by Q4."

The Senior Advocate also said: "It is notable that the turning points now witnessed in the economy, is the work of just two



Aliko Dangote



Allen Onyema

persons (Dangote and Onyema). Imagine what 10, 20 or 50 private sector individuals can do. This raises the issue of putting the private sector at the centre of economic development. Government must withdraw from

Major foreign companies like Procter & Gamble, GSK, and Bayer stopped manufacturing and scaled back operations in Nigeria, due to tough operating environment. This resulted in massive job losses

business. We must move immediately from consumption to production. Q4, 2024, may look on the bright side but it is still early days."

In a release he personally signed, 'Is the Economy Beginning to Turn?' Agbakoba noted that "Nigeria's economy has gone through very challenging times over the past year. Inflation reached 28.92 percent in December 2023, the highest in 27 years. Food inflation rose to 33.93percent in December 2023."

According to him, "the naira depreciated significantly, losing 25percent of value in a single day in June 2023 when the government removed pegging to the US dollar. This made imports much more expensive.

"Removal of fuel subsidies in May 2023 caused petrol prices to jump by 196percent practically overnight, from ₦189 to ₦557 per litre. Prices went through the roof!

"According to the World Bank, accelerating inflation pushed an additional 24 million Nigerians into poverty in the first five months of 2023. By late 2022, 63percent of Nigerians (133 million people) were considered multi-dimensionally poor.

"Major foreign companies like

Procter & Gamble, GSK, and Bayer stopped manufacturing and scaled back operations in Nigeria, due to tough operating environment. This resulted in massive job losses."

BusinessDaySunday gathered that it was not only Agbakoba that has noticed the positive things going on at Air Peace.

Emulate Allen Onyema, Tunde Rahman counsels

In his tribute recently during the 72-birthday anniversary of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Tunde Rahman, a senior presidential aide, had noted that: "It has become compelling that as citizens, we must continue to play our part. The example of Lawyer and Businessman, Allen Onyema's Air Peace and its gallant intervention, which helped to crash the airfares on the lucrative Lagos-London route, is there for all of us to emulate."

At a meeting of private sector operators a few days ago, an ample time was voted to discuss the Air Peace exploits. Participants were unanimous that the Nigerian government must do whatever it would take to support the airline.

An elated member of the group said: "This thing is war. We should be clear-eyed about this and know that Nigeria (not

just Air Peace) simply cannot afford to lose. Let us not be deceived into thinking this is only about an airline flying to London.

"The aviation business is cut-throat and governments play very deeply in it. Just look at the history of Boeing, Airbus, Emirates, BA, Pan-Am, Delta, United, Singapore Airlines, Ethiopian, etc. We need to win this fight. The FG must step up and protect our national interest without fear or equivocation."

All the members at the meeting were in agreement that, "this is a National battle for existential survival, not just for the traveling Nigerians, but for our image, honour and reputation."

In summary, the chairman of the meeting, admonished: "On the commercial/business side of the battle, we all need a DE-LIBERATE plan to fly Nigeria in this case.

"This is enlightened self-interest. When we have done our bit and Air Peace does not deliver, then we can turn our angst on them.

"This goes beyond Air Peace and aviation - this might be the catalyst to make us take: Buy Nigeria; Use Nigeria; Wear Nigeria; Drive Nigeria, Eat Nigeria, etc, more seriously."

Cover

Insecurity: Intelligence-led policing has yielded good results in...

Continued from page 1

Adeoye disclosed the efforts of the state command during an exclusive interview with BusinessDay Sunday.

He also spoke on how the command under him has been able to bring sanity into the once-dreaded Awkuzu police station that used to be occupied by the proscribed Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS).

Explaining why it would seem that the battle against insecurity is not being won in some states, he said: "When you say at the national level; national level is so vast; it is a different ball game with each state having its own peculiar challenges and different agencies having specialised roles to play. An agency is charged with gathering and sharing intelligence, even the police have an arm that deals with its criminal intelligence, security intelligence, among others.

"As an actor and a player in the field, I can tell you that those intelligence apparatus has been very effective. While a lame man would assess and say the situation is so terrible, I, as a practitioner, will say imagine what it could have been like if



not the ongoing efforts. For example, intelligence has gotten to that level where they are able to intercept telephone conversations and know what someone is planning and pre-empt it. So, for every crime that happens, not less than 25 were averted."

Asked why it seems that insecurity is festering while intelligence is failing, Adeoye said that a lot is going on that are not in the public domain.

"If you make it public, you will no longer be effective as

intelligence gatherers. Some things must remain under wraps, but the bottomline is that the situation could have been much worse, otherwise left to their own devices, the insurgents would have taken over the whole place that there would be no more governance. In Anambra, we are intelligence-led," he said.

The Anambra Police boss, who described the state as one of the toughest places to police in terms of the security chal-

lenges, however, said he was fulfilled facing the onerous task and delivering results.

On how he has brought civility into the once-notorious and dreaded Awkuzu police station, Adeoye said that he insisted that the right things must be done and that he read the riot acts.

"The station at Awkuzu used to be occupied by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). I must say that the reform to change the operations and narratives of that place started be-

fore I assumed duty.

"First, you would recollect that the Inspector-General at the time disbanded SARS; they were rebranded, reformed, rechristened to Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team. So, they were redeployed across the state; fresh hands brought in, new operating code was put in place. So, when I came in, all I did was to put my feet down and warned the operatives and their commanders that I would not tolerate extra-judicial killings. That was the first thing – zero tolerance for extra-judicial killings; zero tolerance for brutality, for high-handedness and for subversion of justice.

"I warned them that everything must be above board. Everything must be done according to rule of law; no favour, no fear. I also provided them the equipment they needed for modern policing. I also made it open to the public that we are receptive to hearing their grievances if they had any. I dealt with the complaints that came in. So, when they saw that my approach was for fairness, justice, openness, accountability, they imbibed the new approach and we are delivering tremendous result," he said.

Electricity tariff: Afenifere says power ministry...

Continued from page 1

Secretary, Jare Ajayi on Saturday.

Afenifere spokesman then wondered how comment by President Bola Tinubu that there is no driver of the economy that is bigger than the private sector during meeting with some organisation's CEO, some days ago can come to past when the amount to be paid per kilowatt hour (kWh) of electricity jumped from N68 to N225 just within 24 hours of its announcement.

The Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) on April 4 announced that from the following day, electricity consumers on Band A would begin to pay N225 per kilowatt hour as against N68 they have been paying up till then.

Taking a swipe at this decision, Afenifere submitted that it is erroneous to say that only those who are direct enrollees in a particular Band utilise the power being supplied through that band.

"For instance, a Band A consumer is likely to have people in his/her household or place of work where the power is being consumed. Meaning that if 1.5 million is the figure the government has as enrollees on Band A, the number of people who depend on the power coming therefrom



would be about five times that figure.

"Besides, by calling on players in the power sector to ensure that people get what they are paying for is like putting the cart before the horse", Part of the statement read.

The statement further pointed out that virtually everywhere in the country there is the poor supply of electricity and low quality of the commodity sometimes.

Afenifere noted that if relevant

government agencies are to be sincere with Nigerians, what they should do is to first ensure regular and efficient supply of electricity before acceding to increase in payment for services that are being poorly rendered.

According to the statement, "A rough calculation indicated that a person on Band A who was paying an average of N50,000 per month (on N68 per kWh) would now have to pay N170,000 for the same service. Note the increase!

"It is noteworthy that the Ministry and its agency, the NERC, are interested in the revenue that would be generated rather than first ensuring regular and efficient supply.

"This is in contradistinction to the claim that the government agencies care about the pains of Nigerians. It is clear that rather than exploring ways to reduce the cost of producing energy thus reducing the pains of Nigerians, the relevant government agencies are passing the price of their own inefficiency on the people.

"For instance, increase in the cost of gas was used as the reason for the hike in electricity tariff.

"Yet, it is clear that even the present cost of producing gas, and by implication electricity, can be made more efficient.

"In other words, both the price of gas as well as electricity would be far lower than what they are presently if the agencies concerned had gone into research and/or take advantage of available information on cost-efficient production of energies."

Feature

Nigerian Navy's 'Delta Sanity': Raising the stakes in the fight against oil theft

PIUS DUKOR

Four months after Vice Admiral Emmanuel Ogalla assumed office as Nigeria's 22nd Indigenous Chief of the Naval Staff, Nigeria recorded its highest oil production in almost two years. Subsequent data from Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission showed that the country's crude oil production rose from 1.08 million barrels per day in July 2023 to an average of 1.38 million barrels per day in January and February 2024, representing a 300,000-bpd increase.

Additionally, official figures show that Nigeria's Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) export cargoes have increased from an average of 16 per month in 2023, to 21 monthly in the first quarter of 2024.

These rising metrics offer incontrovertible proof of the seriousness with which the Naval Chief has approached the debilitating fight against the criminality that deprives Nigeria of much-needed oil and gas revenues. In his words, they are "a testament to the positive outcome of the renewed drive by the Nigerian navy towards ensuring that oil contributes optimally to national development."

At the start of 2024, precisely on the 6th of January, Vice Admiral Ogalla launched Operation DELTA SANITY, an anti-crude oil theft (COT) and anti-economic sabotage operation in the Niger Delta, with several vessels and hundreds of Naval personnel deployed on aggressive surveillance and patrols.

In the last three months, Operation Delta Sanity has recorded remarkable successes, putting oil thieves and vandals on the defensive across various parts of the Niger Delta, from Bayelsa to Ondo to Rivers to Akwa Ibom States, and beyond, with the recovery of massive quantities of stolen products, the dismantling of discovered sites, and arrest of suspects. Since inception, Operation Delta Sanity has recovered over 62,000 barrels of crude oil, as well as close to a million litres of illegally-refined diesel, petrol and kerosene; valued in total at almost 10 billion Naira.

Successes recorded in the second half of March 2024 include the discovery, by the Nigerian Navy Ship (NNS) SOROH of 2 illegal refining sites, sacks, drums, hoses, pipes, 2 ovens, 8 reservoirs containing about 53,900 litres of suspected stolen crude oil, a fiber boat containing about 1,550 litres of suspected illegally-refined diesel and 250 litres of illegally-refined kerosene.

Between March 19 and 23, a patrol team from Nigerian Navy Ship PATHFINDER discovered and dismantled 3 Illegal Refining Sites, 21 Ovens, 5 dugout pits, 12 reser-



Vice Admiral Emmanuel Ogalla

voirs, 4 fiber boats and one wooden boat containing about 33,000 litres of suspected stolen crude oil, in Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State. A week later, NNS PATHFINDER seized 2 fibre boats containing about 3,000 litres of illegally refined diesel, around Alakiri to Isaka Axis, in Rivers State.

In Mbo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, a patrol team from the Forward Operating Base (FOB) IBAKA intercepted a wooden boat containing about 15,500 litres of suspected stolen petrol, stored in drums, and arrested one suspect. Also, in Akwa Ibom, Nigerian Navy Ship JUBILEE working with 2 Brigade intercepted 3 trucks containing illegally-refined diesel.

On March 31, 2024, Forward Operating Base BONNY discovered and dismantled 2 Illegal Refining sites containing about 5,000 litres of illegally refined diesel and 10,000 litres of stolen crude oil at Cawthorne Channel and Ke General Area, in Rivers State.

On the first of April, 2024, Forward Operating Base ESCRAVOS discovered and deactivated a newly-laid hose that stretched 3km towards a Chevron Nigeria Limited pipeline at Ajudaiboo Community, Warri, Delta State. Investigations are ongoing to unravel the culprits behind the laying of the hose. That same day, at Agogboro Community, Warri Southwest, an Illegal Refining Site with about 3,000 litres of stolen crude oil was discovered and deactivated.

These are just a handful of the most recent successes. No week has gone by this year without the Nigerian Navy reporting a major breakthrough in this fight against maritime criminality – and it is heartwarming to see attention being paid from various critical quar-

ters.

Speaking in February 2024, at a Regimental Dinner organised by the Nigerian Navy in honour of its retired senior officers, Senate President Godswill Akpabio said, of the Navy: "The numerous arrests of ships and individuals involved in illegal bunkering, destruction of illegal refining sites, smuggled goods and narcotics as well as the increase in oil production in Nigeria, attest to the tireless efforts of the Navy in combatting the nefarious activities undermining Nigeria's economy," adding that "The nation looks up to you and expects nothing short of professionalism which you have exhibited thus far. Be assured that the National Assembly will support you with all the processes needed to succeed."

With this kind of support guaranteed, little wonder that Vice Admiral Ogalla is boldly pressing ahead with the scaling-up of the fleet renewal program he inherited from his predecessor. Speaking recently, the Naval Chief disclosed: "We have categorised the fleet renewal under short, medium, and long-term plans," adding, "The objective of the fleet renewal policy is to develop a system capable of sustaining effective and round-the-clock presence in the Exclusive Economic Zone."

The Naval Shipyard is currently constructing 20 houseboats for brown-water operations, while the Naval Dockyard Limited is pressing ahead with the construction of the Navy's latest Seaward Defence Boats (SDBs). The Navy is also awaiting the delivery, this year, of two high-endurance Offshore Patrol Vessels from Dearsan Shipyard of Turkey.

Additionally, in the next few weeks, the Nigerian Navy is sched-

uled to launch 3 new Fast Patrol Boats (FPBs), from China. These FPBs will inject new momentum into the policing role of the Navy within Nigeria's Exclusive Economic Zone and the wider Gulf of Guinea.

A few months ago, 14 gunboats donated by Akwa Ibom State Government were inducted into service. The Naval Chief has made it a priority to deepen relationships with State Governments, and build the required synergy for mutual benefit.

The fight against oil theft and other forms of criminality is being waged not just in the water, but from the air as well, with cutting-edge technology. In recent months, the Nigerian Navy has taken delivery of 12 new Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), that will take the fight against oil theft to the next level. Three combat helicopters have also been ordered for the Naval Aviation unit, and are awaiting delivery.

Prior to the launch of Operation DELTA SANITY, the closing months of 2023 were very busy for the Nigerian Navy, with the flagging-off of a number of high-profile maritime Exercises, including Exercise CROCODILE LIFT, Exercise GRAND AFRICAN NEMO 2023, Joint Exercise SEA GUARDIAN 2023, and Exercise NCHEKWA OSHIMIRI – all of which recorded impressive successes.

Alongside these Exercises, the Navy hosted several visiting warships from foreign Navies – French Navy Ship MISTRAL; Royal Navy Ship HMS TRENT; Brazilian Navy Ship BNS LIBERAL; Indian Navy Ship SUMEDHA; and the Chinese Navy Escort Task Group, ETG 162 – a demonstration of renewed vig-

our towards the deepening of bilateral military relations, and mutual assistance, with these countries. More recently, on April 2, a Spanish Navy Ship, SNS BAM FUROR, arrived Lagos on a port call; the second Spanish Navy Ship to visit Nigeria in the last six months.

March 2024 marked two years since Nigeria's delisting from the global list of piracy-prone countries, by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB). Vice Admiral Ogalla remains unflagging in his determination to maintain that record, and to set new ones.

In a March 2024 commendation letter from the Global Marine Community to the immediate-past Director-General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), the significant security improvements in Nigeria's maritime environment were acknowledged. It is worth noting that the special security assets acquired by NIMASA for its Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure ("Deep Blue project") are being operated by the Nigerian Navy.

Recently, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu rolled out a new and ambitious vision for Nigeria's oil and gas industry, encapsulated in a series of presidential directives: fiscal incentives to attract billions of dollars in new investments, reduce operating costs by as much as 40 percent, and shorten contracting cycles by from 38 months to less than 6 months, in line with global best practice. All of these reforms will require the underpinning of security, and Vice Admiral Ogalla is fully committed to leading a Naval Force that guarantees the enabling conditions in this regard.

In addition to this, there is the President's blue economy agenda, which necessitated the landmark creation, in August 2023, of a Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy. The Nigerian Navy, fully cognizant of the critical role it plays in enabling the nation's maritime economy through security, partnered with NIMASA in November 2023 to set up a Joint Committee on Blue Economy.

At the end of May, the Navy will further demonstrate its commitment when it convenes the fifth Edition of the International Maritime Conference / Regional Maritime Exercise (INCREMEX) 2024, in Lagos, with the theme: "Promoting the Blue Economy in Africa through International Cooperation on Maritime Security."

It will offer yet another opportunity for Africa's leading Naval Force to showcase, under the leadership of Vice Admiral EI Ogalla, its domination of Nigeria's Maritime Environment, through such impactful interventions as Operation DELTA SANITY, among others, in line with its constitutional mandate.

Feature

Why Nigeria needs to avert potential monopoly in telecoms sector

OLAYINKA ADIGUN

OVER the years, and using its financial might and perceived technological advancement, South Africa has exported power houses across African countries but none more sizable than into Nigeria. Nigeria being the largest economy and population on the continent has historically appeared a favoured destination for businesses.

Many of these economic power houses provided economic advancement and some have dominated their industries with positive experiences. There are however, also negatives that sometimes outweigh the positives. Due to their sizes, some of them have come to dominate the markets they operate in.

The issue of dominance becomes more pertinent during economic downturns especially as Nigerians get poorer by the day. Nigeria's GDP per capita for 2022 stands at \$2,184, materially down from around \$3,200 in 2014 and almost the same as it was in 2008. South Africa's GDP per capita is \$6,770 in 2022, three times that of ordinary Nigerians by contrast albeit it is also struggling with its own issues.

Multichoice, SAB Miller, Stanbic are some of the large beneficiaries of the Nigerian open approach to market. But no company on the continent gets to benefit from Nigeria's size and openness to foreign companies more than MTN as it has dominated the telecom sector for the past decade and keeps expanding its dominance.

Dominant companies are generally considered to be bad for consumers and the economy. When markets are dominated by one or few players, there's a danger that these players can abuse their power to eventually increase prices to customers or reduce quality to increase profits. This kind of excessive market power can also lead to less innovation, losses in quality, stifling local entrepreneurship and higher inflation.

Dominant companies can also influence the direction of the market to favor their own profits above all.

For instance, a firm with deep pockets can set prices below costs and absorb losses until competitors can no longer survive. Then, once the competition is eliminated, the surviving firm can raise prices high enough to more than cover the losses it took while establishing its now-dominant market position.

The problems with dominant companies also go beyond the economic effects. Many large, economically powerful companies also have considerable political influence and the ability to "capture" the political and regulatory process. This allows a powerful firm to tilt the legal and regulatory processes against any potential threat to its market power, and to bring about changes that further enhance the profits it earns.

MTN was founded in 1994 in South Africa as M-Cell. In 2001, MTN started operations in Nigeria as the country decided to privatize the telecom industry and issued four GSM licenses then. In 2001 when MTN entered Nigeria its total revenue was around Zar 8 billion. By 2015, only Nigeria was contributing more than Zar 50 billion



of MTN's total revenue. This was the extent that the size and impact Nigeria has had on MTN. It has only increased.

MTN, Econet Wireless (later became Airtel), Glo and Nitel each got a GSM license in 2001 after each paying \$285 million in government fees. Today, MTN's subscriber share of the market is around 50% or less, their revenue share, however, is estimated to be at least 65% of the telecom market profits and everyone else (Airtel, Glo, 9mob and all the smaller companies) share the remaining 35%. NCC actually designated MTN as a dominant operator since 2013.

In 2018, the Nigerian Senate, Central Bank of Nigeria and the Attorney General of the Federation each began an investigation into MTN's potential illegal repatriation of close to \$9 billion from Nigeria to South Africa between 2007 and 2017 in addition to tax irregularities amounting to more than two billion dollars. One third of the size of the Nigerian budget for that year was repatriated out of the country by MTN it was declared over that period. What was contentious then, is that all three government agencies alleged that MTN conspired with banks to repatriate the funds illegally by not getting the appropriate documentation done for such massive amounts but ended up settling for a miserly \$53 million dollar payment. We don't intend to tackle the legality (or lack of) of the repatriation, but we would like to highlight that MTN repatriated more than 10 billion dollars in hard currency from Nigeria when the initial license fee paid was \$285 million. Nigeria is adding close to five million people a year and getting poorer by the year as MTN is transferring hard currency back to its shareholders in South Africa at such a scale. MTN, of course, has invested billions in infrastructure to create a successful business in Nigeria. But these billions, you can argue, were generated by the millions of Nigerian phone users and whole a portion got reinvested in equipment and infrastructure in Nigeria, the rest is shipped out as profit to MTN South Africa.

Because Nigeria doesn't have fixed telephony infrastructure, Nigerians use their phone for every connectivity application. They use it to browse the internet, for social media, to collect information and exchange emails, to bank and exchange money, to download movies....etc. The fact that the cellphone is so important in the life of ordinary Nigerians substantially

compounds the dominance problem. MTN is effectively the largest phone company in Nigeria, the largest social media company, the largest banking services provider, the largest cable company, etc. just because of how Nigerians use their cellphones.

Why is the above harmful? One would say, we are Nigerians. We believe in open markets, and we encourage foreign investment and foreign presence among us. That is true, but the interests of dominant player's sometimes (maybe most times), can diverge from national interests to the detriment of national goals. This happens for many reasons.

Firstly, the size of MTN means it can intentionally or unintentionally maneuver competition out of business to the detriment of the ordinary Nigerian phone user. Over the years, MTN has been allowed to swallow many of its smaller competitors directly or indirectly - The indigenous Visafone was bought by MTN in the year 2013. The spectrum of the indigenous Intercellular was bought by MTN in the year 2017 rendering them inoperational. In 2023, MTN took over Natcom's spectrum. They followed this with an announcement that they had bought OpenSkys Services Limited, a company that got the spectrum from NCC and commenced the discussions to sell to MTN before they had even paid for it. Why would the then EVC, Danbatta-led NCC and Minister Pantami's supervisory Ministry of Communications & Digital Economy ("MoC"), then allocate a valuable government and Nigerian resource at depressed values to a private company (Openskys) that turns around and sell it at massive profits, with the approval of NCC and MoC, to MTN almost instantaneously?! This is an example of how dominant companies can thwart and somehow "capture" the regulatory process to the detriment of open markets, competition and ultimately the national interests and the interests of the ordinary Nigerian.

These activities have allowed MTN to accumulate massive amounts of spectrum; substantially more than Airtel and all the other operators combined. A few days ago, we read about MTN's discussions to enter national roaming services with 9mobile. This means that 9mobile's valuable spectrum will be used by MTN on MTN's network effectively placing 9mobile's spectrum under the control of MTN. This transaction, if approved by the regulators, will further enhance MTN's dominant

position and of course hold one of the three competing GSM operators by the throat. The new leadership of NCC is strongly encouraged to deny the agreement as it is not in the country's best interest.

The NCC's EVC, Aminu Maida and the Hon. Minister, Communications, Innovation & Digital Economy, Bosun Tijani should know better than follow in the path of the previous administration who by all measures appear to have been swayed over for whatever reasons by the size and position of MTN to allow them further their dominance on account of indigenous and other competition.

When Etisalat came to Nigeria in 2007, it came with a lot of fanfare. The Emirati government-owned entity brought Mubadala, one of the largest sovereign wealth funds in the world, with it. After a few billion dollars of investment and a few years, Etisalat Nigeria became bankrupt and, unable to compete. It therefore handed over the operation to its debtors for free. They couldn't achieve a critical profitable mass that was enough to compete with the dominance of MTN. Even Econet couldn't hold its own and its ownership changed several times until eventually Airtel took hold of the operation and somehow stabilized but still at a fraction of MTN's market share. What is next? How long can the likes of Airtel and Glo hold their own before they are weakened enough for the pounce? Like what is happening with 9mobile today!!

Interestingly, none of the companies that MTN acquired, or their spectrum were healthy when MTN made its move. They were weakened to very bad financial levels before the pounce upon them by MTN. These moves come with a double benefit for MTN. They lose a competitor, and also acquire frequency spectrum which makes them more efficient and allows them to even become more profitable so they can pounce on their next prey.

MTN has become a league of its own and everyone else is competing for the crumbs. Nitel is gone. Swiftnet reduced to a state where it is almost unable to pay its cost. Glo and Airtel are holding their own for now but how long before a curve ball exposes them to the paws of MTN.

Secondly, they say absolute power corrupts absolutely. It breeds a sense of entitlement and complacency. This encourages behavior that pushes the lines of morality and social equity. We'll give a few illustrations on how this applies to dominant companies that potentially believe they are above the law and the citizens they are supposed to serve.

An analysis was done of MTN Nigeria's public filings with the Nigerian Stock Exchange over the past few years and realized that MTN Nigeria has repatriated around one billion dollars to pay dividends to its South African shareholders during 2021 and 2022. In 2020, MTN Nigeria repatriated almost zero hard currency from Nigeria. All this changed when Ralph Mupita and Karl Toriola took over the leadership positions of MTN in South Africa and Nigeria respectively. In the next two years, 2021 and 2022,

Interview

Nigeria will struggle to compete without services export policy to prioritise investments – Madu

Obiora Madu is an export consultant and director general of the African Centre for Supply. He recently launched a book tagged 'Services Export in Practice' where he outlined the importance of services export, highlighting the fact that the sector can boost Nigeria's export earnings. Madu said Nigeria needed to put a comprehensive Services Export framework in place that outlines objectives, targets, and action plans for promoting Services Export such that the nation can earn foreign exchange in the wake of scarce dollars and provide a platform for job creation. AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE brings the report. Excerpt:

What is Services Export and how much is its economic value?

Services Export is a significant part of the export business. It is any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another, which is essentially intangible and cannot be seen. Its production may or may not be tied to any physical product. It is the way the world is going now. It constitutes about two-thirds of the global trade. The beauty of Services Export particularly for developing countries is that it is a huge opportunity to tap into global trade such that even the least developed countries have the opportunity to make a living from exporting services.

Most of them are beginning to export services rather than goods. Any nation that is not paying attention to services export is not diversifying and is denying itself revenue.

According to data from the World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO), in 2022, the global services export was valued at \$7.1 trillion representing 7.1 percent of the world GDP and 23 percent of global trade of goods and services. Right now, investments are going more into services than into commodities.

For Nigeria, we are shortchanging ourselves in terms of services export due to lack of policy direction and the Central Bank of Nigeria has no way of tracking services export from Nigeria.

Statistically, we don't know how much services export that is going on in Nigeria today. Nigeria must buckle up because we are being left behind despite all the advantages that we have. We are not doing well in outsourcing, business services, and other services in terms of export.

We are doing well in telecoms and financial services, particularly the banking system but for the SMEs to be able to mainstream service as their counterparts do globally there is a need for policy and to create incentives because the nation is losing revenue for not capturing services export.

What is the growth projection for the next five years in terms of services export on the global stage?

We may not be able to predict accurately for the next five years but the fact is that the tendencies are very clear. Factors such as economic growth, trade policies, geopolitical development, technological advancement, and global demand for services will be determinants. Globalisation and industrialisation are expected to drive growth in the services sector. Services such as IT, outsourcing, financial, consulting, and



Obiora Madu

transportation are likely to remain great contributors to the growth of global services exports.

Emerging economies such as least-developed countries are increasingly playing an important role in services driven by their growing services sectors and competitiveness in service areas.

Narrowing it down to Nigeria, what are the growth projections for Nigeria?

Nigeria's services export potential could be influenced by domestic reforms aimed at diversifying the economy from being oil-dependent. Investment in sectors such as information technology, telecoms, and financial and professional services could contribute to Nigeria's services export growth.

Again, improving infrastructure, regulatory environment and ease of doing business may enhance Nigeria's competitiveness in the next five years.

However, challenges such as infrastructure deficit, regulatory bottlenecks, security concerns, macro-economic instability, and a general lack of awareness could constrain Nigeria's growth.

Today, America earns 80 percent of its foreign exchange from services and intellectual property. We need to join because so many African countries are ahead of us in this area.

How is Nigeria paying for the absence of a services export policy? What implication does it have for

the nation's economy?

Without a comprehensive Services Export policy, Nigeria may fail to leverage its competitive advantage in various services sectors and this will result in missed opportunities, and an inability to grow the economy, create the necessary jobs, and generate revenue.

It will result in limited diversification. Each time we talk about diversification, we talk about agriculture. Agriculture is very important, no doubt, but services are the new oil. The underdeveloped state of the services sector is part of what it is costing us because as long as we don't become a known service destination our services export sector will remain underdeveloped.

Only a few people who are strong enough will be able to brave it. Reducing competitiveness is part of the challenge but if you have the policy, you can create the necessary incentive; then service providers can face the challenging international market and break in without any problem.

Our foreign exchange earnings are also being affected here and the underdeveloped infrastructure is also part of the challenge. Without a policy framework to prioritise investment in trade infrastructure Nigeria will struggle to compete effectively. The absence of a well-defined policy in services export will impede the country's economic development, competitiveness, and resilience to external shocks.

Therefore, developing and implementing a comprehensive services export policy is crucial. One of the key things that are holding Services Export down is the fact that the country does not have a way of capturing Services Export. For that reason, we don't know if Services Export is happening. I do know that it is happening but we don't know how much.

What recommendations can you make to the Nigerian government and its agencies to promote Services Export in Nigeria?

First, there is a general lack of awareness about Services Export. So, we need to start from there. I have been part of the Services Export expert in Geneva since 2005 and I just currently pushed out a book on 'Services Export in Practice' to get people to understand services export, know the modes, understand the classifications from WTO, how to enter into the international market, and how to prove your credibility including services of the future.

So, we need more of such efforts and the government needs to invest but the number one is to develop comprehensive services export strategies for the country. The last one was done by the Commonwealth Secretariat and that was over 10 years ago, which has become stale. This is an effort that can be carried out locally by maybe a group of consultants. When we develop a well-defined and comprehensive services export strategy that outlines key objectives, targets, and action plans for promoting Services Export, it will focus on identifying key sectors with export potential, addressing barriers, and also enhancing competitiveness.

Another thing is investment in infrastructure and technology. It will go a long to support the development of the services sector especially infrastructure technology, telecoms logistics, improvement in digital connectivity, transport networks, and infrastructure that can enhance Nigeria's competitiveness in the global services.

Next, is to promote trade facilitation and ease of doing business, streamlining trade processes by reducing bottlenecks and facilitating services export. Nigeria should prioritise trade facilitation measures such as reducing paperwork, expediting the Customs processes, and implementing electronic trade platforms to simplify trade.

Also, there is a need to market the nation as a service-providing country. A lot of efforts need to go in because it is like every activity is de-marketing the country. A lot of help will be needed from the gov-

ernment and embassies. Years ago, the South African President once said the country would be paying attention to two things they are outsourcing and tourism. When a President speaks like that, the economy adjusts itself to go with the presidential statement and the target that the country has.

Strengthening the regulatory framework is very important because right now we don't know the agency that is regulating outsourcing. We know that the Export Promotion Council is promoting services export but the one responsible for regulating it, is a different thing. These are all the things that a policy and strategic document will do for Nigeria.

Implementing a clear and transparent regulatory framework is crucial. For example, things like service level agreements. In outsourcing business, principals can just call service providers to reduce their administrative fees at will but if there is a good legal framework, that will not happen.

Then, invest in skill development and capacity building. Enhancing skills and capacity development is vital for building a skilled workforce because we need to deliver high-quality services for export. Nigeria needs to invest in education and training programmes to develop expertise in key sectors and promote entrepreneurship in service-related issues.

This is very important because to get SMEs to fall in; we will continue to have issues and cannot get the result that we are looking for. We need to support SMEs and startups. There are a lot of startups in Nigeria and it wouldn't take too much to push them into doing well. We can also promote private partnerships; where necessary, SMEs can collaborate with the public sector through PPPs. Nigeria should encourage collaboration between the government, private sector, and civil societies to identify opportunities, address challenges, and create incentives that would promote services export.

There is also a need to enhance market intelligence and change strategy for export promotion. The ability to monitor and enhance progress is what we need in Nigeria because we don't seem to be measuring a lot of things. We need to develop KPIs, track progress, conduct regular evaluations, and adjust strategies as needed for us to get to where we are going. By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can strengthen its services sector, unlock new opportunities for economic growth, and enhance its competitiveness in the global market.

Entertainment

Why we are partnering academic institutions to address some challenges in health sector – UNICEF

In this joint interview with BusinessDay Correspondent, **REGIS ANUKWUOJI**, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Health Specialist, Enugu, **Ifeyinwa Anyanyo**, and **Maduka Ughasoro**, Consultant Paediatrician and the Director, Directorate of Research and Publication Collage of Medicine University of Nigeria, Ituku-Ozalla Enugu respectively, spoke on the importance of the fourth International Scientific conference organised by the University in partnership with UNICEF and other partners, with the theme: 'Mitigating the Negative Impact of Health Sector Brain Drain: What are the Research Options?' Excerpts:

UNICEF Representative, please can you explain what the International Scientific conference is all about and why is UNICEF interested?

The conference was organised by the University of Nigeria; so, I am directly noted, the focus person we engaged with was Professor Maduka Ughasoro, who is the chairman and then reached out to our front office in Abuja to engage with the academia because increasingly we are partnering with academic institutions, collaborating with them in addressing some challenges as they concern the health sector.

So, what was UNICEF's interest?

The conference itself was majorly under research, you know and how we could use research to be able to address the challenges as they concern the health sector. So, for us as UNICEF, research is very key and instrumental to what we do in a push to promote the lives of every child and woman in the country and globally. Our focus is to work with partners that we know can collaborate with us, strengthen the aspect of providing data and information to influence our programming to guide the kind of interventions we do to look at our programme effectiveness, are we doing well, do we need to go back to the drawing table and redesign the programme, and they'll come up with policies that will influence programming and influence the kind of resources that are located to the delivery of equity health services to the populace.

What type of policies are you referring to?

For instance, there's a lot of talk now on universal health coverage and there's a lot of emphasis by the government, the state government, the government at the federal to prioritise strengthening the primary healthcare systems so you can see that policy trusts shifts even coming from the national to lay emphasis to service delivery at the grassroots, because you find out that at the grassroots we're able to get a larger number of people assessing services there and so it provides our guidance to say okay a lot of our resources should go into this because this particular cadre of health care is reaching more people; so, these are some of the policy guidance you see and it's from research. You know it's from looking at the available data to ask ourselves where are people assessing services more. Every cover of the healthcare system is very crucial but data has shown us where a large number of people assess services; so, using that data it influences the kind of resources that go into different sectors or different cadre of health care. So, at the federal level there's a lot of push for strengthening family healthcare systems; so, that's just an example of policy trust and shifts that you see

The theme of this conference is 'mitigating the negative im-



Maduka Ughasoro

... pact of health sector brain drain', what are the research options; can you kindly give an insight to that?

Yeah, I think it is clear to everyone what's happening. There's a lot of, will I say, service, people are leaving the country, the shores of the country, to get better, quality of life for their families. So, the health sector is one of the sectors that has been heavily impacted by this move. So, you can see the academia looking into this and asking what can be done to correct the wrongs of the exit of trained healthcare workers. Because these healthcare workers, over the years, the country, families have put in a lot of resources to train this cadre and then you have them exiting the country. So, it's something that needs to be paid attention to. I am happy that this conference kind of zooms in on this issue for us to look at long lasting solutions to this mass exodus of healthcare team. Pushing the boundaries of ethics. What do you have to do with ethics of the profession? Has it anything to do with the mass exit, example of professionals? You know, when you talk about health systems, we are governed by medical set of ethics that binds how we do things. How do we do; patient-doctor interaction or healthcare worker-patient interaction, and then the number. You know, for every kind of care, they're supposed to be like a specific number to the patient population. So, I think that is what that team is trying to circle in.

But where we are leveraging on, as UNICEF, is like I mentioned, our focus on strengthening health systems. If you have a gap in the human resource already, that health system is already affected. So, our focus is looking at how we can better support the government to ensure that this sector is not undu-

ly affected, and the beneficiaries of the health system are not at that disadvantage. So, even though you have exodus, there should be a way to ensure that it doesn't affect the health system.

The Consultant Paediatrician and the Director, Directorate of Research and Publication, Maduka Ughasoro:

Prof, you are the chairman and the coordinator of the recent concluded fourth International Scientific conference organised by the research and publication College of Medicine, University of Nigeria, Ituku-Ozalla, can you tell us what the International Scientific conference is all about?

By the word 4th, means that the previous first, second and third conferences had been organised by the Directorate of the College of Medicine, University of Nigeria. The aim is to create a platform where all staff of the college both in and outside come together to showcase their research work, the cases they've managed over the past one year or beyond and give a little bit of insight. The College of Medicine has five faculties, you know, Clinical Science, Physical Science and Basic Medical Dentistry, Bio Science and Technology, you know. So, these are the five faculties under the College of Medicine. All the staff are students, you know, based on their collaboration and affiliation and the work they've done over the recent time, come together, make their presentations, those that are in the country and not only design figures, those who invest resources on some areas, you know, this last conference that just ended, has something to do on mitigating the negative impact on health



Ifeyinwa Anyanyo on immunisation

sector, something like that. What are the options? You know, that is just the main theme of the conference and also it has other intellectual properties and patents one looks at health and other aspects.

In this one we invited Chief Speaker who spoke on the issue of funding in fragile economy where we are and also the Chief Medical Director also spoke on the Brain Draining; we had also a Senior Advocate of Nigeria that spoke on intellectual property and patent rights of the case. This one that just ended was an improvement of what we had last year and submitted what we got about something abstract submitted and presented and quite a huge number of participants also were in attendance during the conference

Prof, what is the conference expected to achieve with the theme 'mitigating the negative of health sector Brain Drain'?

Well, it's no longer news. You don't even need to be in the health sector to know that, our health sector is facing one major challenge beyond other recent challenges. This thing they call ('Japa'), you know, people are emigrating, you know, in different areas. When you leave the health sector to another sector where they think that they are better taken care of. And they know one thing with migration is that because somebody moves. When they move, they move with the capacity they acquired. And when they move, they deny people who could have benefited from the training they got. And that means the sustenance won't be there. So, we felt that among the protection that when you are looking at this, look at something that is topical.

Is there any way we can look inwards, you know, to understand how to research this idea of migration from the health sector? Some good abstracts were presented. People have looked into that area and they realised that beyond what we have, beyond the challenges that every other sector face, there are some things that can be done, you

know, to start ameliorating the push. Because when people are moving and looking at the push and pull, the pull is nothing out there that are like repelling them or pushing them out and I can remember the same as presented by somebody that gave an overview on policies, on the policies that point towards interpretation. What can be done. That person presented something on intensive motivational health care workers, how can they be motivated? I remember something about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. You know, that beyond whatever, there's a list of things, environment, where they are working, you know, has to be good. We're not talking about payment now, the environment, you know. So, those are some of the key things that I'm telling you that came up and so many other abstracts. Even in the area of ethics, how do you now protect somebody? Why not implement something ethical? So, the essentials of the conference show I was able to bring to form some of the little things that we can start implementing such that we may not be targeting those that have gone, but how we can retain those already in the health sector so that they will be there for a little while and be able to pass on the capacity they've achieved over time. I remember one of the presentations. The presented pointed out that in time, those in the health sector should look in wards, that we should learn how to protect our intellectual property. That pattern is design something and put out there by itself for somebody to buy all those things. So, believe that these are some of the low hanging fruits where people should be exposed to all the options they have. And when they know, when they are empowered, they will be able to now do something that reduces that drive to leave the sector to a place that they are not even so sure what would be their luck when they get there, you know. So, they know you have to look at the situation. These are some of the issues that the conference looked at.

Issue

How unemployment fuels cybercrime in Nigeria

KENNETH ATHEKAME

In the wake of escalating youth unemployment, a disconcerting trend is surfacing—a surge in cybercrime and a resurgence of voodoo practices.

This unsettling correlation between economic distress and unconventional criminal activities underscores the pressing challenges faced by the younger generation.

Banking malware attacks rise by 8% in 2023 in Nigeria – Kaspersky

Kaspersky's recent statement sheds light on the cyber threat landscape in Africa, noting Nigeria's concerning trend of an 8% increase in banking malware attacks in 2023.

You do not need to travel far across Nigeria to see a generation of young people lost in the world of cybercrime and ostensibly inspired by the likes of Hushpuppi.

You will find them in many Nigerian cities like Lagos, Benin and Owerri, and even up to Accra, Johannesburg, Dubai and Kuala Lumpur. It is from these remote locations that young opportunists try to launch phishing and ransomware attacks, including malicious spams, all over the world. Often when they try to escape criminal justice, they easily stand out with their characteristic way of dressing and brazen lifestyle.

Some of these cyber criminals did not complete their education while others are high school graduates or even students. Many address themselves as 'yahoo boys' – a known term in Nigeria for cyber criminals, suggesting that they are unashamed of their practices. Those in Accra describe their enterprise as a 'pressing computer'.

Osahon (not their real name) explained to BusinessDay how many young people go the extra mile to employ the services of spiritualists, apparently to control their victims telepathically to yield to their deceitful demands.

"One thing about computers and the internet is that they are addictive. It is easier for a child to be glued to the computer without thinking of doing something else.

"For some of the Nigerian youths, the computer has become a tool of exploitation, a means through which they make a living by fraud, swindling the unsuspecting victims of their



Hunting for non-existent jobs

hard-earned money.

"Today, they are known as the 'Yahoo boys', but before the advent of technology, financial fraud had been in existence. Popularly known as 419-ners, these fraudsters specialised in using fax machines to defraud unsuspected foreigners and their fellow Nigerians.

"In the early 90's, some of these people were the big men and women in society, they commanded respect because of the enormous wealth at their disposal.

"But they later met their Waterloo, when some of them were arrested by the anti-graft agencies, tried, and convicted. They lost some of their assets to the government, and have since been struggling for survival," Osahon said.

In recent times, and with the coming of digital technology, Nigerian youths, especially undergraduates, have taken to the illicit trade now known as 'Yahoo Yahoo'.

Investigations by BusinessDay revealed that the Yahoo business is responsible for the drastic reduction in cultism in higher institutions, as it has been overshadowed by widespread cyber fraud.

Beginners in this craft, also known as 'Yahoo boys', often use Yahoo's free email account to perpetrate the crime. Online fraud became more prevalent in Nigeria in the 2000s with access to the Internet. Youths, who engaged in the scam became rich overnight, making the illicit job attractive to more people.

These youngsters lavish their

ill-gotten wealth on ephemeral things like expensive cars, houses, mobile devices and jewellery. They are seen in expensive hotels, clubs, eateries, lounges in the high browser areas of major city and what have you.

"The irony of it all is that they are highly respected even among security agencies. Worse of all is that some security agencies work as bodyguards to these fraudsters," a source disclosed.

Findings by BusinessDay also revealed that thousands of undergraduates dabble in internet fraud. "A rich Yahoo boy is a role model for the youth, they fancy his lifestyle and want to be like him.

The only thing they think about is how to make easy and quick money," a source who wants his identity hidden, told our correspondent.

The trend, however, is taking an ugly twist with mothers encouraging their children to learn the trade, with the promise of giving them the necessary spiritual fortification when they are done with learning, all in the quest of making quick money to live larger than life in the society.

Ololade, who resides in the Alimosho local government area, a suburb of Lagos State, admires the flamboyant lifestyle of these internet fraudsters so much that she encouraged her 16-year-old son, Bode, to learn the rudiments of the.

Bode had been undergoing basic training, looking for clients to swindle and also looking for dating mates online that would fall prey to his antics

"Yes, he has started learning

and I am waiting for him to get to like 18 years old, then I would go and bathe him (spiritual fortification) so that he will be making money," Ololade boasted.

Well, what can one probably expect from a mother who is addicted to gambling and Betting and who believes gambling can go a long way in settling family problems? Ololade believes that Yahoo is an approved way of making ends meet.

A 31-year-old internet fraudster, Fimidi Ade (not real name), who resides in the high browser area of Lekki Phase1 boasted to our correspondent, how he rose from a net worth of N2m to N200m in less than 5 years. Ever since he mastered the art of hacking business emails (known as wire-wire), he said his life has never remained the same.

Okwudire a secondary school graduate, told our correspondent that he did not make much money from the dating platform, adding that he had to pay N2m to a senior colleague in the business to learn the art of wire-wire, which he claimed changed his fortune.

He disclosed that he does not have any plan to quit the business which had brought him fortune anytime soon. Okwudire had been involved in this fraudulent business for over 8 years.

He said, "During my internship, I lodged in a hotel for nearly a month with my mentor. All expenses, meals, transport, and more were paid by me just for learning the business. However, the mentorship didn't go as planned as my senior colleague lacked transparency. He always concealed his laptop when attempts were made to observe and learn."

Frustrated, Ade terminated the arrangement after one month but managed to glean some knowledge that he later applied.

It is worth noting that internet fraud has evolved to a point where cybercriminals in Nigeria are resorting to different forms of rituals to enhance their illegal gains.

In a bid to confirm that these fraudsters go the extra-mile to make it in their chosen line of business,

A cyber security analyst, in a recent interview with BusinessDay, warned about the escalating

threat landscape posed by cybercriminals.

Insights shed light on the pervasive success of social engineering techniques, underscoring their role as the linchpin in contemporary fraud and hacking endeavours.

He exposed the multifaceted nature of fraudulent activities, categorising them into both local and international domains.

He drew attention to the local fraud activities, where credit card fraud takes centre stage, leveraging sophisticated social engineering communication techniques like smishing, phishing, SPIM, and vishing.

He also pointed out how these criminals adeptly masquerade as trusted entities, instilling panic among their targets about potential threats to their bank accounts.

"The ultimate goal is to coerce individuals into divulging sensitive information, such as credit card details, allowing the fraudsters to swiftly empty victims' accounts before they realise the deception," he said.

"The lack of advanced technology support hampers efforts to effectively track and prosecute these fraudsters," he said.

Describing a typical smishing attack, he paints a scenario where attackers craft text messages seemingly from legitimate sources like banks, government agencies, or well-known companies.

The messages, often laced with a sense of urgency, compel recipients to take immediate action, whether it's clicking on a malicious link, calling a fake customer support number, or replying with sensitive information.

He emphasised that the overarching goal of smishing attacks is to exploit the trust people place in text messages, manipulating them into providing information that can lead to identity theft, financial fraud, or other malicious activities.

The attackers deploy various tactics to make their messages appear genuine, from using official logos to mirroring the language and formatting typical of legitimate organisations.

He said: "This often occurs through electronic communication channels such as emails, instant messages, or fraudulent websites. The fraudsters initiate contact with their targets, compelling them to click on seemingly innocuous links, which serve as tools to clandestinely harvest sensitive information from unsuspecting victims."

He concluded by stressing the alarming reality that victims, in many cases, unwittingly provide access to their personal and financial details, ultimately exploited by fraudsters for illicit gains.

"The prevalence of such phishing tactics underscores the urgent need for heightened cyber-security awareness to shield individuals from falling prey to these increasingly sophisticated and malicious schemes."

She emphasised that cybercriminals, commonly referred to as fraudsters, scammers, or colloquially as "Yahoo boys," strategically exploit vulnerabilities

in both systems and human psychology to deceive and defraud unsuspecting individuals.

"The use of various tactics, including phishing and identity theft, underscores the evolving nature of these cyber threats."

Additionally, malware attacks directly target systems, leveraging malicious software to infiltrate, gain unauthorised access, steal data, or disrupt operations.

Describing his method, he said, "To impersonate a celebrity, you download their images and videos online, create a Facebook profile, and initiate a business. Despite its popularity, this approach continues to yield significant returns for some, requiring commitment and consistency."

He continued, "Many Yahoo Boys own iPhones, which are often obtained from their clients. Targets sometimes find it easier to send devices than money. Additionally, we sometimes use cash to buy these devices after a successful cash-out."

Despite the new tactics deployed by these fraudsters, the need for relevant agencies saddled with the responsibilities of ensuring cyber security to up their ante cannot be overemphasised.

Caution against unsolicited communication requesting personal information, adoption of complex and unique passwords with two-factor authentication, and avoidance of public Wi-Fi for sensitive activities were underscored as essential protective measures.

An expert urged individuals to remain vigilant against potential vulnerabilities that could be exploited.

"Recommendations include maintaining awareness of cyber threats, avoiding weak passwords, and implementing robust password management practices."

Highlighting the pivotal role of proactive cyber security measures, stressed the importance of regularly updating systems and software to address known security flaws.

"There is a need to verify the identity of individuals or entities seeking sensitive information, especially in unexpected situations. The installation of reputable anti-malware software, along with its timely updates, was deemed crucial to detecting and removing potential threats," he said.

He emphasised the essence of awareness, vigilance, and proactive cybersecurity measures as essential elements in safeguarding against the escalating threat of cyber fraud.

He urged the public to stay informed, implement robust security practices, and diligently protect personal and financial information in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

Meanwhile, the former Minister of Communication and Digital Economy, Isa Pantami had once admitted that cybercrime is growing at an alarming rate globally.

"In 2018, the cybercrime industry generated about \$1.5tn while social media-related crimes generated a minimum of \$3.25bn. Bitcoin crimes generated \$76bn in 2018.



Unemployed youths

NewsXtra

Okuama/Okoloba crisis great pain to us - Oborevwoori

MERCY ENOCH, Asaba

Delta State Governor, Sheriff Oborevwoori, on Friday, said his administration was sorely pained over the recent crisis leading to the killing of some army officers and soldiers at Okuama community in Ughelli South Local Government Area of the state.

Oborevwoori stated this at the Government House Annex, Warri when he received on a courtesy visit, the Chairman and members of the Board of Enquiry set up by the Defence Headquarters to probe the Okuama Killings.

The governor, who narrated how the state managed the situation, said the State Government would do all it could to assist the board on its assignment.

Governor Oborevwoori further said that in order to honour the deceased officers and soldiers, he led a top level delegation of members of the State Security Council and members of the State Executive Council to attend the funeral of the slain officers and soldiers in Abuja.



While saying that a transparent investigation should be conducted to fish out the real culprits of the heinous crime, he said that innocent citizens should not be made to suffer

any further. "I am very happy for this meeting taking place here today in Warri. Most people who spoke about the issue did so out of ignorance because they

lacked the true knowledge of the facts of what happened. Setting up this Board of Enquiry is a good one.

"In my MORE Agenda, we said we are going to ensure

peace and security, and for the first time in a long while, we celebrated Christmas without any hitches and I must thank the security agencies in the state for a job well done.

"In Delta State, there are two bodies we don't play with; the Advisory and Peace Building Council and the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution because they are doing a lot to ensure enduring peace in the state.

"I told the Secretary to State Government to invite the Okuama/Okoloba people. So, I made it mandatory that the Chairmen of Ughelli South and Bomadi Local Government Councils to be in attendance, the members of the State House of Assembly who are representing the constituencies should also be in attendance and the Presidents-General of the communities should be in attendance.

"That meeting was held on the 7th of February and they signed a peace accord. So, we were not expecting anything negative when the military went there for a peace mission.

"In Delta State, we don't encourage crisis. So, we want to

assure you that which ever information you people want, we will give it to you and we will also come with our position paper to submit to you people before you leave.

"That will also guide you on the role that we have played as a state because if we don't come with this position paper, you will not know the role that the state has played," the Governor said.

Earlier, Chairman of the Board of Enquiry, Air Vice Marshal David Ajayi, said the board was in the state to investigate the unfortunate incident that happened at Okuama.

Ajayi said: "We are here as a fact-finding mission and not to apportion blame. We are here to gather facts from security agencies, community leaders and community dwellers.

"This report will also help to ensure healthy communication that will enhance civil-military relations and ensure that economic activities thrive again in the affected communities."

He called on the Governor to assist the Board in its enquiry to ensure that relevant stakeholders were invited to the give account of what led to the crisis.

Students loan: Kwara central senator lauds Tinubu for signing bill into law

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

Saliu Mustapha, senator representing Kwara central and chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Production Services and Rural Development, on Friday commended President Bola Tinubu for signing the Student Loans (Access to Higher Education) Act (Repeal and Re-Enactment) Bill, 2024, into law.

In his response to the signing of the bill, Senator Mustapha

expressed his support for President Tinubu's decision, highlighting their shared conviction on the benefits of the loan scheme, which he had fervently advocated for on the Senate floor.

Mustapha, who spoke via his official X page, emphasized the significance of President Tinubu's assent to the bill, describing it as a welcome development.

He extended his congratulations to all Nigerian students poised to greatly benefit from this groundbreaking initiative.

It reads, "I share the same conviction with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on the benefit of the loan scheme, which I advocated on the Senate floor. The President's assent to this bill is a welcome development, and I congratulate all Nigerian students who will greatly benefit from this initiative."

The move he said marks a significant milestone in the realm of education and underscores the government's commitment to enhancing access to higher education for Nigerian students.



Samuel Joseph Samuel, Chairman, ORIGIN Tech Group Nigeria; Abubakar Kyari, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, and Eric Alao, GM, ORIGIN Tech Group, Agri-Foods Business, during a recent courtesy visit by group's management to the minister in Abuja on the proposed national food production expansion programme from 50m to 100m tons.

We expand Kilimanjaro's presence in Nigeria to drive value for stakeholders – Sundry Foods Boss

...Opens 6 new restaurants

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Sundry Foods Limited (SFL), a leading food services company in Nigeria, has announced the expansion of its flagship Kilimanjaro Restaurant with the recent launch of six new restaurants across Nigeria.

Managing Director/CEO of the company, Ebele Enunwa said in a statement that the expansion effort was designed to enhance customer experience at locations in close proximity to where they live or work in the country.

"We aim to transform the culinary experience of Nigerians and bring it to their doorsteps.

"We take great pride in the fact that our expansion strategy is delivering tremendous results across our key growth pillars. We have a clear trajectory for future growth as we continue to build on our brand's strength and impressive footprint within the country," Enunwa said. According to the statement, the new branches were opened in response to the desires of its numerous customers residing or doing business in those areas.

The statement further disclosed that the company just opened a new Kilimanjaro Restaurant at the brand-new Koka Junction Shopping Mall,



Ebele Enunwa

along Benin-Onitsha Expressway, Asaba, Delta State. This is the third Kilimanjaro restaurant to be established in the state.

"A new restaurant was also opened within the Deidei area of Abuja, FCT. This restaurant opened on Sunday, 24th March, 2024," he said.

Similarly, other Kilimanjaro restaurants recently opened by Sundry Foods in parts of the country include: Kilimanjaro Uptown Mall, located on Zaire Road, Barnawa, Kaduna, Kaduna State; Kilimanjaro at Plot 17, CMD Road branch, near Caleb International School, Ikosi, Lagos; Kilimanjaro at 60B Macaulay Street by Nnamdi Azikiwe Road,

Umuahia, Abia State and Kilimanjaro Benin Mall, by Protea Hotel, along Sapele Road, Benin City, Edo State. With these additions, the company now operates 194 outlets across the country.

Enunwa reiterated that the expansion drive would deliver the company's trademark excellent quality food and related services to Nigerians all over the country, adding, "By making strategic and highly targeted investments to drive value for partners, Sundry Foods will also drive value for customers and shareholders, while managing costs, improving margins, and elevating the company's experience for all stakeholders."

NewsXtra



L-R: Olagoke Olabode, CEO, Gtext and Associates; Kola Olootu, media professional and brand ambassador, Gtext Homes and Martha Onsachi, CEO, Gtext Lands, during the recent allocation of plots to investors at the White House estate, Moniya and Beryl Golf estate, Ibadan.

Nigerians urged to leverage land banking for investment diversification

SEYI JOHN SALAU

Nigerians seeking to diversify their investment portfolio have been urged to leverage land banking as an investment option in real estate on the back of the benefits and return on investment (ROI) it offers.

Land banking is considered one of the oldest real estate investment practices where investors buy small or large quantities of undeveloped land, intending to profit from the resale of the land in the future.

According to real estate experts, it is believed to be among the relatively low-risk investment opportunities with a potential for high returns.

This type of investment option allows the investors to buy land in underdeveloped communities and bank it until there is substantial infrastructural development or population growth in the area before selling it for a higher price or developing it to meet the growing housing demand.

"For those who want to increase their investment portfolio,

land banking is their best bet and if they are looking for a real estate company; we can help them grow their investment through land banking, Gtext Land have them covered," Martha Onsachi, CEO, Gtext Lands, said during the allocation of plots to investors at the White House estate, Moniya and Beryl Golf estate, Ibadan, held on Thursday April 5, 2024.

According to her, the company focuses more on land banking to help smart investors reap the dividends of investing in real estate. She disclosed that the company's mission is to help investors build wealth through land banking with the use of innovation and technology.

"Our major focus is on land banking."

She further urged the government both at the federal and state level to ease the processes involved in obtaining title documents for land, so as to make real estate a more attractive investment option for Nigerians.

"Government should also help in simplifying the process of obtaining title documents to make real estate attractive to more Nigerians."

She said further that Gtext Lands have made it easier for investors to invest by offering them an opportunity to buy at a lower price and keep it for a longer period of time. "You either use it or flip it off for profit or you can build for residential or for commercial purposes.

"So, the benefits here are that we give luxury service plots and for an investor that is investing with us here in our estates, we give you nothing but luxury," she said.

She also assured interested investors that they will be buying into a service estate that comes with perimeter fencing, access roads to their plot of land, and a centralized sewage system. "So, it comes with a whole lot of packages and that is why we call it luxury service plots," she said.

Speaking further, she disclosed that White House and Beryl estates are two of their major estates, which some smart investors bought when the price was relatively cheaper. According to her, the company offered a 50 percent discount on the actual price as part of its Easter and Ramadan sales promo.

Security remains priority of my administration - Otti

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State has said that security remains a top priority of his administration's agenda and that he would strive to sustain it.

Otti said this at the Government House, Umuahia when he received a delegation of the Flag Officer Commanding, Naval Training Command, Lagos, Ignatius Albara (Rear Admiral) who was in the state on a familiarisation tour

of the Nigeria Navy College of Accounting and Finance, Owerri.

The Abia governor noted that security was paramount for the government because all its initiatives would amount to nothing if security failed.

He revealed that in the last 10 months, all security outfits in the state had been working tirelessly to ensure adequate security for the state, and disclosed that his administration had set up an inter-agency outfit, "Operation Crush" dedicated to ensuring maximum security in the state. Otti expressed

joy that the operation had been successful.

"We've been working in close partnership with the college and Eytayo (O.E. Eytayo, Commandant, Nigeria Navy College of Accounting and Finance) is part of our government, virtually everything we do in terms of security, he is involved.

"I want to really appreciate your visit. Here we take security very seriously. In fact, it is the number one item on our agenda, simply because all the initiatives we have will come to naught if security fails.

LOBEYL Foundation empowers market women in Aba

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Looking Beyond Your Limitations (LOBEYL) Foundation, a non-governmental organisation, at the weekend, empowered five petty traders in Ahia Ohuru (New Market), Aba, the commercial hub of Abia State.

LOBEYL is working on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1, of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, which calls for an end to poverty in all manifestations, by 2030. The International poverty line is currently defined at \$1.90 or below per person per day.

They are also working on SDG 8, which promotes sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The Ahia Ohuru event was organised to mark the 2024 World Women's Day, celebrated annually on March 8.

This year's theme was, "Count her in: Accelerating gender equality, through economic empowerment."

The beneficiaries namely Chioma Iheanacho, a fresh pepper seller, Amarachi King-

sley, tomatoes seller, Roseline Eke, Stockfish seller, Nkechi Friday, groundnut seller and Eziha Ogechi, fresh tomatoes seller, were each gifted with a table, chair, big umbrella for shelter, apron and piggy box for savings.

Also, a soft drink seller, identified as Nkechi, who pitched her business idea at the event, got a cash gift of 10,000 from LOBEYL Foundation, to support her business, while other women in the market were provided with sun protection hats, aprons and piggy boxes to encourage them to save.

Rachel Ijeoma Anyaso, manager, LOBEYL Foundation, explained that the organisation goes into communities to provide help for those in need.

According to her, "We look beyond the environmental factors to impact lives positively, financially, socially and health wise.

"Currently we are covering up SDG 1, and SDG 8. And we are using this event to celebrate market women, especially micro entrepreneurs to mark this year's International Women's Day with the theme "Inspiring Inclusion."

"So, we decided to bring this

event here to celebrate with the market women, by so doing, we are inspiring Inclusion and some of the incentives we gave them are sustainable.

"These are things that can boost their businesses, like we talked about financial literacy, savings culture and provided them with piggy boxes to enable them save on their own.

"We also introduced them to Piggyvest account, consequently, we are bringing digitalisation into the market place. So, this event is sustainable and we are going to monitor the progress and take feedbacks and testimonials from the beneficiaries."

Anyaso, who is also the creative director of LOBEYL Foundation, expressed excitement over the success of the event, and thanked David Agbai, the visionary and president of the Foundation, for his support to the project and volunteers for their roles and prayed God to keep sustaining the foundation.

She described the selection process that produced the beneficiaries, as fair, noting that volunteers were sent into the market to source for micro traders, who were in need of what they provided.



Senator Alli lauds Oyo's ex-deputy governor's contributions APC, victories in 2023 election

REMI FEYISIPO Ibadan.

Senator Sharafadeen Alli (APC-Oyo South) has lauded Moses Alake Adeyemo, former deputy governor of Oyo State and his contributions to the building of a stronger and united APC in Oyo State as well as his contributions to the victories recorded in the 2023 general election.

The Senator, while extending his heartfelt felicitations on the occasion of his birthday,

said: "Throughout his tenure, he has been a beacon of integrity and excellence, earning the respect and admiration of his peers as well as constituents alike."

In a statement he personally signed, the senator conveyed his warm wishes to Adeyemo, acknowledging his invaluable contributions to the development of Oyo State.

Senator Alli highlighted the significant impact the celebrant has made in various spheres of governance and community engage-

ments, expressing his admiration for Adeyemo's dedicated service to the people of Oyo State.

As Adeyemo marks another milestone in his illustrious journey, Alli wished him continued good health, happiness, and prosperity in the years ahead.

He expressed the optimism that Adeyemo's wealth of experience and wisdom would continue to inspire and guide the younger generation towards a brighter future for Oyo State and Nigeria.

NewsXtra

Jego partners Coscharis to deepens sustainable energy in Nigeria

INIOMBONG IWOK

In a groundbreaking move, JéGO Technologies Inc. has partnered with Coscharis Technologies Limited, as part of the renowned Coscharis Group, to launch a multimillion-dollar distribution deal.

This venture is aimed at distributing thousands of JéGO's revolutionary modular clean energy systems, the JéGO PowerPods, across Nigeria and Ghana.

According to statement by the management of the companies, noted that the ambitious project is steered by JéGO's innovative leadership and is poised to supply modular sustainable energy to an expansive number of homes and businesses, as well as to a growing base of electric vehicle users, a key part of JéGO's phased infrastructure investment as it prepares to roll out its electric vehicles in Africa.

The statement stated that the partnership is especially significant, as it represents a substantial stride towards a sustainable energy future in Africa.

The statement added that Coscharis Technologies Limited, is recognized for being part of the Coscharis Group, the exclusive distributors of prestigious brands such as BMW, Rolls-Royce, and Ford, brings a legacy of excellence to this partnership.

As a trusted distributor of leading technology brands like HP, Huawei, IBM, Microsoft,

Lenovo, Samsung, Philips, Cisco, and Dell, Coscharis Technologies has now embraced JéGO Technologies Inc. among these illustrious names, a testament to JéGO's innovative prowess in the clean energy sector.

JéGO Founder/CEO Frederick Kevbe Akpoghene highlights the essence of this collaboration, saying that Joining forces with Coscharis Technologies is a milestone that reflects the firms commitment to providing modular clean, reliable, and affordable energy.

"Our goal is to empower the

African continent with energy independence, starting with Nigeria and Ghana," he said.

The Managing Director of Coscharis Technologies Limited, Emomine Mukoro during the signing of the JéGO-Coscharis agreement, called on the Federal Government and Nigerians to invest in the solution as it is an unprecedented opportunity.

According Mukoro, "It is not just about mitigating the different challenges of our world today, it is about building a brighter, more sustainable future for generations to come.

"First and foremost, green energy represents a tangible solution to the existential threat of climate change. By harnessing the power in solutions curated by the JéGO's Team, we can drastically reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and curb greenhouse gas emissions.

"This transition to clean energy is on only morally imperative but also economically prudent, as it mitigates the long-term effects associated with environmental degradation, resource depletion and reduces the prevalence of respiratory diseases and safeguard biodiversity.



L-R: Adedotun Ajibade, Media and Insights Manager, Rite Foods Limited; Olayiwola Temitope Mercy, winner of N100,000 cash, and merchandise in Rite Foods' April Fools' Day social media contest, and Olawale Odenusi, Digital Lead, Rite Foods, during the prize presentation at the company's head office in Ikeja.

Firm launches app to ease management of cooperative societies

SEYI JOHN SALAU

Clé Digital Services Limited has announced the launch of its flagship product, the Clé Cooperative Management Solution, a digital platform designed to streamline cooperative management and enhance members' engagement.

"From multipurpose societies to housing cooperatives and agricultural cooperatives, the Clé Coop Solution empowers cooperatives of all sizes to efficiently manage their operations, communicate with members, and foster collaboration," Oladipupo Olabisi, Business Manager, Clé, said during the recent unveiling in Lagos.

According to Olabisi, the application represents a significant milestone in the cooperative industry, offering a comprehensive suite of features tailored to meet the diverse needs of cooperative organizations across various sectors.

Speaking further on the benefits of the solution, Olabisi said that CLÉ COOP brings the services and relevance of being a member of a cooperative society to the fingertips of the members, administrators,

and executives of cooperative societies.

With Clé, members get easily onboarded, pay their monthly contribution, track their cooperative activities such as loans, savings, investments and even track dividends paid by their cooperative society and a whole lot more," Olabisi said.

Ezekiel Oni, director, CLÉ, said the application was developed to suite any cooperative society with robust features to cater for all categories of members and societies.

According to him, service excellence is at the center of its operations at Clé Coop Solution.

He said further that Clé Coop can be accessible via Web, as well as the USSD for registered users.

He further disclosed that the mobile app will be unveiled soon for Apple and Android enabled devices.

"It also has notification features that enables members know when there are new items for 'Credit Sales', events concerning their cooperative society, and other announcements excos of any cooperative society may want to make known to its members," Oni said.

ALX wins Tech Unite Africa award for excellence

ALX Africa, a leading tech innovation accelerator, has been awarded with the prestigious Tech Unite Africa Award for Excellence in Online Learning Platform of the Year.

The award, presented by Tech Unite Africa for Tech Innovation Recognition and Awards (TIRA), recognises ALX's contributions to the tech ecosystem across Africa through its innovative platform structure.

"This recognition reflects our team's hard work and dedication to building a platform that not only educates but also inspires and empowers individuals to thrive in the tech industry and beyond. We are incredibly honoured to receive the Tech Unite Africa award for excellence in Online Learning

Platform of the Year," Ruby Igwe, general manager, ALX Nigeria, stated.

According to Igwe, ALX Africa has long been at the forefront of revolutionising online learning, offering a dynamic and interactive platform that empowers individuals across Africa to acquire new skills, access cutting-edge resources, and unlock their full potential in the digital age.

She stated further that ALX's platform provides learners with personalised learning experiences tailored to their unique needs and interests, with a focus on fostering creativity, innovation, and life-long learning.

"ALX Africa's learning platform offers a wide range of programmes designed to equip learners with the tech skills and knowledge need-

ed to succeed in today's rapidly evolving digital landscape. Our transformative programmes are designed to equip young people with the tech knowledge they need to succeed.

"From AI Career Essentials (AiCE) to AWS Cloud Computing, Salesforce Administrator, Data Analytics, and Front-end and Back-end Web Development, we have a wide range of offerings to suit their interests and aspirations," Igwe stated.

She stated further that the award shows ALX Africa's commitment to excellence and innovation in the tech ecosystem across Africa. "With this prestigious accolade, ALX reaffirms its position as a leading force in tech learning and a catalyst for positive change in Africa and beyond."

APC chairman accuses Mutfwang of meddling in legislative affairs

NATHANIEL GBAORON, Jos

The Plateau State All Progressives Congress (APC) Chairman, Rufus Bature has accused Governor Caleb Mutfwang of meddling in legislative affairs, resulting in the rejection of APC candidates awaiting swearing-in as lawmakers.

Bature's allegations during a press briefing at the party's Secretariat on Friday in Jos, centered on the swift swearing-in of nine out of 16 APC candidates who had been waiting since November 2023.

The situation stemmed from a mid-2023 Appeal Court ruling nullifying the election of 16 PDP state Assembly members due to party executive issues.

The court directed that the losing APC candidates

be sworn in.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) subsequently complied with the order, and issued certificates of return to the said APC candidates in November last year.

However, Bature claimed that the newly sworn-in lawmakers were pressured to obey the governor's directives and signed documents preventing them from impeaching him, among other conditions.

He warned of the consequences for members who allegedly agreed to leave the APC after being sworn in.

Bature also highlighted the dangers of imposing the current Speaker's leadership and extending the tenure of local government transition committee chairmen.

"The document forced the newly sworn in Lawmak-

ers to accept the leadership of the current Speaker; also to allow the extension of the tenure of the 17 local government transition Committee chairmen for the next six months," he said.

Currently, the Plateau State House of Assembly is chaired by Gabriel Dewan, the only member of the Young Peoples Party (YPP) in the assembly.

When contacted on the telephone, the state Publicity Secretary of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), John Akans, simply said: "I am in a meeting we will discuss later."

BusinessDay recalls that the speaker of the Plateau State House of Assembly, Dewan had earlier on Friday sworn in nine out of the 16 APC members whom according to him have met the criteria to be sworn in.

Sports

Between NFF hunt for new Super Eagles' handler and call for local coach

Stories by SEYI JOHN SALAU

The need for the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) to urgently fill the vacant spot in the coaching crew of the senior national team, the Super Eagles has been leading topic among soccer fans across the country as the focus of Nigerian football fans shift from the TotalEnergies Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) to the 2026 World Cup qualifiers.

Another reason for the urgent action is the latest FIFA Ranking that saw the Super Eagles moved to 30 in the world while also making it into the top three in Africa just behind Senegal and Morocco.

Even after making it to the final of the last AFCON, Nigeria was ranked as the 3rd best team on the continent.

The Atlas Lions occupy 13th spot in the world but retain pole position on the



continent, followed by Senegal who is 17th in the world and second in Africa.

While fans are calling on the NFF to expedite actions on the appointment of a substantive Super Eagles head coach, it is believed that it usually takes the NFF an average of six months before they arrive at a deci-

sion between when a coach is sacked and when another appointment is announced.

This according to football analysts might put the Super Eagles 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifier at risk considering the team already dropped some points in the campaign.

This is made worse by the

fact that the Super Eagles lost out to Ghana in the final qualifying stage of the Qatar 2022 World Cup. Therefore, missing the next World Cup will inflict some damage to the Super Eagles as a brand.

However, while the NFF is hunting for a gaffer, the fans have been calling for the appointment of an

ex-Super Eagles player to carry on from where Jose Peseiro stopped.

Some ex-internationals have indicated interest in managing the team and have taken a further step to submit their application to the NFF. "I'm the best for the job because currently, I'm a UEFA Pro badge coach from the Spanish FA, an ex-professional player in Europe, Africa and Asia, and an ex-international.

"Like the NFF said, they want a coach who knows African football, I coached in the NPFL for five seasons and I've lived in the country more than any of them (other applicants) in recent years," Henry Makinwa, a Spain-based former Super Eagles forward said in a recent interview.

While his credentials are not in doubt for the position of Super Eagles head coach, it is also essential to note that the senior national team is not a training ground for coaches, and should not be a rehabilitation ground for ex-internationals.

Similarly, we must understand that the Super Eagles need a coach that can command respect from the players and other national teams. Hence, the need for the NFF to consider the brand equity of the team in appointing the next Super Eagles coach.

Because at this juncture, the team's overall interest should be the first consideration in arriving at the choice of the next gaffer for the Super Eagles of Nigeria. "Finidi is a good coach, but he is yet to prove himself as a coach," Dare Philips, a Lagos-based sports analyst said.

According to him, Finidi is yet to bring his wealth of experience to play with the People's Elephant, Enyimba of Aba, and wonder why some fans are urging the NFF to appoint him as Super Eagles coach. "We cannot appoint a Super Eagles coach for rewards or settlement; Finidi has to convince the NFF technical committee that he deserves the job."

GOtv Boxing Night 31: Adekanla boast of snatching WABU title from current champion

Light welterweight boxer, Adeyemi "Spirit" Adekanla, has declared that he would snatch the West African Boxing Union (WABU) title from current champion, Segun "War" Adeyemi, when they confront each other at GOtv Boxing Night 31 on May 1.

The 10-round title fight is one of the sev-

en bouts scheduled for the boxing event at the Molade Okoya-Thomas Indoor Sports Hall of the Teslim Balogun Stadium, Lagos.

"I am preparing really hard for this fight. It is my turn to have the WABU title, so no more 'War'. I've never lost a fight in my career, and I will keep that record on May 1," Adekanla said, disclosing that he

aims to keep his unbeaten record by claiming the WABU title.

Both boxers are undefeated in their professional careers. 'Spirit' has a record of 12 wins with four knockouts, while 'War' has a record of 10 wins, one draw and seven knockouts from 11 fights.

In the other clashes, Raheem "Baddo" Animashaun and Samuel "Apata Roro" Moses will face-off in a national welterweight challenge; Hammed 'Ese' Ganiyu will confront Yusuf Ogunbunmi in the light welterweight category; Sikiru "Omo Iya Eleja" Shogbesan and Arabambi "Power" Ojo will slug it out in the super featherweight category.

Afikun Gbenga will square up against Adewale Oladeji in a super welterweight challenge fight; Emmanuel Abimbola will face Azeez Ayobami in the national lightweight category, while the national flyweight champion, Sifon 'Best' Iwatt, will take on Sikiru Ogunyaju in a national challenge bout.



MTN Champs hosts athletics championships in Ibadan

MTN Champs, Nigeria's leading Schools' Athletics Championships, recently hosted the second leg of the games with a record 2,600 participating athletes and a newly introduced Continental Relays following a successful kickoff in Asaba.

For the first time, the competition will be held simultaneously in two locations: Lekan-Salami Stadium and the University of Ibadan (UI) Sports complex. Additionally, the event expands to include a senior category, catering to a wider range of athletes.

According to the organisers, MTN Champs offers a deeper significance to the participating athletes beyond the thrilling competitions and records to be

broken. The event will feature teams from five African countries competing in Nigerian soil.

It was also disclosed that the relays serve as a crucial qualifier for the World Relays and ultimately, the Olympic Games.

"While football holds a special place in the hearts of Nigerians, athletics has steadily carved its own path to success. We've witnessed countless athletes who've filled us with pride on the international stage, from The African Games to the Olympics.

"These individuals have put Nigeria firmly on the global map. We are excited to be part of this initiative and will continue to support things that matter to Nigerians," Idowu Adesokan, general manager, consumer

marketing, MTN Nigeria, said during a press conference in Ibadan.

Bambo Akani, founder, Making of Champions, emphasised Nigeria's strong potential in athletics, noting the nation's impressive record of eight out of ten relay medals won at the Olympics in the last decade.

"We need to start setting our sights higher. We're not satisfied with dominating Africa in track and field. That's a low bar for us to set for ourselves. In the next five years with MTN Champs, you're going to see Nigeria be mentioned in the same breath as USA and Jamaica in track and field, sprinting, and the Olympics. That is why we're also using this event to launch the idea of the continental relays," Akani said.

De Bruyne brace move champions Man City level with Liverpool

...As City beat Palace 4-2 at Selhurst Park

Stories by SEYI JOHN SALAU

Kevin De Bruyne score twice as champions Manchester City thrashed Crystal Palace 4-2 to keep the pressure up against Premier League leader Liverpool at Selhurst Park on Saturday.

Bruyne netted his 100th goal for the club as Man City level points with leaders on 70 points pushing Arsenal to third on the table with 68 points.

Later on Saturday night, Arsenal went back to the top of the league on 71 points with a 3-0 win over Brighton at the American Express Community Stadium, while Liverpool have a date with Manchester United later today to restore their lead.

Jean-Philippe Mateta fired the hosts in front three minutes after kick-off before De Bruyne drew the sides level moments later.

It took just four minutes more for De Bruyne to bag his brace, drilling past Henderson to pad City's lead in the 70th minute, after which



Palace boss Oliver Glasner introduced a host of substitutes including Michael Olise, who had not played since Palace's 4-1 loss to Brighton on February 3.

He set up fellow substitute Edouard for a golden chance, and after squandering the initial opportunity he made up for the miss when he poked past Ortega in the 86th minute.

Grealish wanted more with a late chance in second-half stoppage time but sent his effort over.

Man City took the lead for the first time less than two minutes after the restart via

Rico Lewis' second Premier League goal before De Bruyne set up Haaland for City's third.

De Bruyne then added another with a solo effort to make it a century of goals for City in the 70th minute.

Palace substitute Odsonne Edouard clawed one back late on, and while Pep Guardiola's men looked to pad what could be vital scoring statistics at the end of the season, they could not find a fifth in seven minutes of second-half stoppage time.

Mateta gave the home support – as well as the Gunners and Liverpool – something to smile about with a low strike

that clipped the inside of the far post before crossing over for the opener.

January signing Adam Wharton, who earned the assist, next tried setting up Eberechi Eze but overpowered the pass before City broke back and tested Dean Henderson with efforts from Julian Alvarez and Rodri, the latter calling the Palace shot-stopper into a particularly fine punch.

There was little Henderson could do to stop De Bruyne, who curled into the top right corner for a brilliant finish to draw the sides level in the 13th minute.

Palace replied with determination, enjoying another spell inside City's final third, and the frenetic pace finally ebbed as the visitors took control and piled on the pressure.

Haaland, through on goal, forced Henderson into a save and Alvarez sent an effort wide, though it was Jordan Ayew who came closest to altering the scoreline before the break.

The Eagles wanted a penalty when Josko Gvardiol barged into Eze on the stroke of half-time, and while referee Paul Tierney brushed off their protests, the home support had plenty to cheer about their side's performance in the first period.



AC Milan thrash 10-man Lecce 3-0 at San Siro

AC Milan thrashed 10-man Lecce 3-0 at the San Siro on Saturday to cut the deficit at the top to 11 points between city rival Inter Milan.

Milan scored within six minutes after a strike from Christian Pulisic on the edge of the box, and took 13 minutes for the Rossoneri to double their lead through Olivier Giroud.

AC Milan coach Stefano Pioli named four changes to the side that beat Fiorentina 2-1 last weekend.

Malick Thiaw's injury meant that Matteo Gabbia came into central defence, and with Ismael Bennacer not fully recovered, Yacine Adli

took his place in midfield.

Theo Hernandez returned after serving his suspension, while Pulisic made his way back to starting lineup following Ruben Loftus-Cheek suspension.

Lecce's hopes were put to bed in the dying embers of the first half when Krstovic was given his marching orders for a high challenge on Samuel Chukwueze.

Milan's third of the game came through Rafael Leao, following a swift counter-attack.

Juventus are yet to play, but the Diavolo sit nine points clear of them in second and 16 points clear of fifth-placed AS Roma, with seven games left to play.

CAF CL: Holders Al Ahly beats Simba 2-0 in Cairo

...Ease into semi-finals

TotalEnergies CAF Champions League title holders Al Ahly beat Simba FC 2-0 in Cairo of Friday to secure their place in semi-finals.

Goals from Omar El-Sulaya and Mahmoud Kahraba helped the Egyptian giants reached the last four.

The Cairo-based side displayed their dominance from the outset, seeking an early breakthrough to unsettle their opponents.

French striker Antony Modeste threatened Simba's defence in the 11th minute, but his header narrowly missed the target.

Modeste came close again in the 22nd minute, only for the referee to disallow the goal for an offside call against his teammate, El Shahat, who provided the assist.

Despite Simba's attempts to advance and create opportunities, they found themselves thwarted by Al Ahly's goalkeeper, Mostafa Shobier, who made crucial saves in the 33rd minute to keep his team's goal intact.



The first half ended goalless, with both teams locked in a battle for supremacy.

However, Al Ahly broke the deadlock early in the second half when Omar El-Sulaya capitalized on a chance in the 47th minute, firing a powerful shot past Simba's Moroccan goalkeeper, Ayoub Lakred, to give his side a 1-0 lead.

Simba intensified their attacks in search of an equalizer, but their efforts were in vain. Meanwhile, Al Ahly remained proactive in attack, aiming to

extend their lead.

In stoppage time, Al Ahly was awarded a penalty after El Shahat was fouled inside the box.

Mahmoud Kahraba stepped up to take the spot-kick and calmly converted it in the 90+6th minute, sealing a 2-0 victory for Al Ahly over Simba SC.

Al Ahly will face the winner of the match between TP Mazembe and Petro de Luanda in the semi-finals of the competition, as they seek to retain the title.

Everton leap off the drop zone with 1-0 win over Burnley

...As Brentford held Aston Villa in 3-3 draw

Everton won the relegation battle by gaining the upper hand in the encounter against 10-man Burnley winning 1-0 to leap off the drop zone.

Everton secured their first Premier League win since December to compound Burnley's chances of moving out of the relegation zone.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin's goal gave Sean Dyche's side a first win in 14 league matches to end a six-month wait for a goal.

The goal condemned the struggling Claret's to 19 on the Premier League table with 19 points from 32 matches and -35 goals difference.

At the Vila Park, Brentford frustrated Aston Villa's Premier League top-four hopes



after the home side threw away a two-goal lead to draw 3-3.

Brentford scored three times in nine minutes before Villa put one back to restore some pride for the Unai Emery led side

Villa looked to be consolidating fourth position after goals either side of half-time from Ollie Watkins and Morgan Rogers put them in the ascendency.

But they hit the self-destruct button as quickfire strikes from Mathias Jorgensen, Bryan Mbeumo and Yoane Wisasa saw Brentford turn the game on its head.

The hosts had to rally and a Watkins header rescued a point, but the result handed the impetus to Tottenham in the race for guaranteed Champions League qualification.

Sports

Old Trafford Clash: Can Man United spoil Liverpool's title chase?

Stories by Anthony Nlebem

Manchester United are gearing up to face Liverpool at Old Trafford in the Premier League this weekend, aiming to replicate their recent FA Cup victory over their rivals.

In the FA Cup quarter-final three weeks ago, the Red Devils secured a narrow win against Liverpool at Old Trafford, with Amad Diallo scoring a late winner to thwart Jurgen Klopp's side's trophy aspirations.

However, the upcoming encounter feels distinctly different. Liverpool reclaimed the top spot in the Premier League standings with a late victory over Sheffield United at Anfield, highlighting their credentials as title contenders.

While Erik ten Hag's side emerged victorious



with a 4-3 scoreline in their previous clash, United suffered a shocking 2-3 defeat in their recent match, squandering a potential victory over Chelsea in a frenetic encounter that saw a dramatic 101st-minute winning goal.

Despite midweek triumphs for their

adversaries, Liverpool's win over Sheffield United propelled them back to the summit of the Premier League. As they aim to avenge their FA Cup defeat against United, rivals Arsenal and Manchester City will be hoping for a favour from the Red Devils. United's recent league

form has been inconsistent, with only one win in their last five matches. Meanwhile, Liverpool has been impressive away from home, winning six of their last seven Premier League away games and maintaining a scoring streak in 26 consecutive away matches across all

competitions.

Liverpool's dominance in Europe's top five leagues, with 16 victories and 59 goals in all competitions. Despite a goalless draw with Man United earlier in the season, they have not failed to score in both of their Premier League meetings with the Red Devils since 2007-08, hinting at a potential revenge.

Ian Wright expressed concern for Manchester United ahead of the clash, fearing they could suffer a heavy defeat against Liverpool at Old Trafford. The former Arsenal star believes Liverpool will be more focused and ruthless, aiming to put United in their place.

"I fear for Man United," Wright said on his Ringer FC podcast. "I just feel like Liverpool will be much more focused than they were in that FA Cup game and be even more ruthless."

"We know United can be ruthless and [Alejandro] Garnacho alone is going to be a threat. But Liverpool

will want to go there and put them in their place.

"I worry for United because I can see another big hiding, I could see them getting a good hiding to be honest. It's not like Old Trafford is a fortress anymore. If Liverpool come and have their heads on it could be a massive worry for United."

Ten Hag reckons that despite recent results, his side have shown they can compete with the best teams in the division. The Dutchman admitted that United must learn how to cement three points, however.

"You have seen we have qualities. We have some great players. We can be in momentum and we can play at very high standards," he said.

As the two football giants prepare to renew their rivalry, all eyes will be on Old Trafford to witness whether United can once again thwart Liverpool's title aspirations or if the Reds will continue their relentless pursuit of

Boxing promoter predicts winner of Fury vs Usyk fight

Frank Warren, promoter of Tyson Fury, is confident that Fury will emerge victorious in the upcoming bout against Oleksandr Usyk, predicting a knockout victory for the undisputed heavyweight championship clash, particularly by attacking Usyk's body.

While acknowledging Usyk's potential strategy to target Fury's previous cut, Warren remains steadfast in his belief that Fury will prevail. Despite Fury's past cut against Otto Wallin, Warren notes that Fury overcame it convincingly to win the fight.

Well, I would," Frank Warren told Sky Sports. "Of course he will [try to do that]."

But Warren, who co-promotes Fury, doesn't believe Usyk will be able to derail the WBC champion.

"He had a worse cut against [Otto] Wallin," the promoter pointed out. "Tyson had a dreadful cut in that fight and won the fight convincingly with a bad cut, a real bad cut."

Fury has repeatedly shown his ability to deal with a crisis, rising for instance from knockdowns against both Deontay Wilder and Francis Ngannou more recently to preserve his unbeaten record.

"He's got plan A, plan B and a plan C and more importantly, he's got a big heart," Warren said.

If anyone is going to take advantage of a vulnerability



in this fight, he is convinced it will be Fury.

"One thing about Tyson, if he senses a crack or sees any weakness, he's the biggest exploiter of it and that's why it's going to be such an exciting fight," Warren said.

"On the other hand, Usyk might feel from the Ngannou fight there are some things that he can exploit and I'm sure he will. He's a competitor.

"He's a competitor from amateur days right up until the present day. He's done everything that's been asked of him."

But Warren believes Fury will hurt Usyk to the body:

"His Achilles' heel, as I've said, and I'm surprised the so-called experts never picked up on it, has always been his body. Daniel Dubois, that's what he was trained for, to go and exploit that and he nearly pulled it off."

"I think Tyson will knock him out," Warren said. "Like I predicted he would knock out Wilder in the second fight. I fancy him to do that."

"I think he'll stop him but I think it going to be a real, real exciting fight while it lasts."

"You have got two undefeated fighters, the best of their generation and we'll find out who is the real deal on

the 18th."

Fury's resilience in facing adversity, evident in his comeback from knockdowns against opponents like Deontay Wilder and Francis Ngannou, further bolsters Warren's confidence in his fighter. Warren emphasizes Fury's strategic versatility and his ability to exploit any perceived weakness in his opponents.

While acknowledging Usyk's competitive spirit and potential strategies, Warren believes that Fury will capitalize on Usyk's vulnerability to body shots, citing Daniel Dubois' attempt to exploit this weakness in Usyk's previous fights.

Nadal tipped to win French Open amid injury struggles



Rafael Nadal, a 22-time Grand Slam champion, remains one of the top contenders to win the French Open despite his recent injury struggles, according to his uncle and former coach, Toni Nadal.

Nadal's unparalleled dominance on clay courts has solidified his status as one of the greatest tennis players of all time. Even amid injury setbacks, his reputation as a clay court maestro makes him a formidable force to reckon with at Roland Garros.

While Nadal's injury forced him to withdraw from the Monte-Carlo Masters, casting uncertainty over his French Open campaign, Toni Nadal expressed confidence in his nephew's ability to compete at the highest level.

He acknowledged that while Nadal was previously the undisputed favourite in Paris, the current landscape presents multiple contenders, with Nadal poised to be among them.

"If he is well and manages to recover... I trust that Rafael is within that group," Toni Nadal stated in an interview with EFE.

Nadal's resilience and determination to overcome setbacks have been central to his success throughout his career. According to Toni Nadal, Nadal's work ethic and mental fortitude have been instrumental in his ability to navigate challenges and remain competitive.

"Very outstanding natural conditions, and constant work... Never stopping believing in himself was also essential, and being willing to overcome the adversities that the future brought him," Toni Nadal emphasised.

With Nadal shifting his focus to upcoming tournaments like the Barcelona Open and the Madrid Open before Roland Garros, his commitment to returning to peak form underscores his relentless pursuit of excellence on the tennis court.

Super Falcons, Morocco close to booking 2024 Olympics spots

Stories by Anthony Nlebem

The Super Falcons secured a crucial 1-0 victory over South Africa's Banyana Banyana in the first leg of the 2024 Women's Olympic Football Tournament African final qualifying at the Moshood Abiola Stadium in Abuja.

A goal from team Super Falcons captain, Rasheedat Ajibade in the 42nd minute was enough to hand the Nine-time African champions the vital three points with eyes on the second leg.

Coach Randy Waldrum called Pachuca forward, Chinwendu Ihezuo, into the Super Falcons' starting lineup as US-based Asisat Oshola could not get a starting role due to a late arrival to the camp.

Ajibade scored from the penalty spot after a foul was committed by Banyana Banyana defender Noko Matlou in the 40th minute.

Nigeria maintained pressure in the second half, with Ajibade providing Uchenna Kanu an opportunity in the 52nd minute, although the Racing Louisville FC striker failed to find the target.

As the game progressed, the 11-time WAFCON champions adopted a cautious approach to safeguard their one-goal lead and avoid errors ahead of the crucial return leg against South Africa.

The return leg will take place at Pretoria's Loftus Versfeld arena on Tuesday, April 9.

The first-leg defeat to the Super Falcons put Banyana Banyana's dream of qualify-



ing for the 2024 Olympics in Paris hanging.

Nigeria will hope to build on their first-leg advantage when they travel to Pretoria to take on Desiree Ellis' team on Tuesday.

The winner of the double-leg encounter will represent Africa at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, alongside the winner between Zambia and Morocco.

There will be two African women's teams at the Olympics. The other team will be

determined between Zambia and Morocco.

This year's Olympics will take place in July and August in Paris and both Banyana and Nigeria are fighting to represent the continent for the third time in the event.

The Banyana Banyana will fly back to Johannesburg on Saturday morning while the Super Falcons will fly out of Lagos on Sunday night.

Morocco took a significant step towards Paris 2024

following their 2-1 first-leg victory over Zambia away from home.

The Atlas Lionesses secured the crucial away victory with striker Rosella Ayane's winner in the 95th minute, positioning them well for the return leg scheduled on home soil.

Under the guidance of coach Jorge Vilda, the Moroccan squad demonstrated resilience and skill, with goalkeeper Khadija Rmichi's notable save denying Zambia's Prisca Chilufya's penalty attempt.

Morocco seized the initiative with a stunning goal by Zineb Redouani in the 45th minute, followed by Zambia's equalizer from Lushomo Mweemba in the 80th minute. However, Ayane's late heroics secured victory for Morocco.

As Morocco prepares to host Zambia in the return leg, they aim to maintain their form and secure their spot at the Paris Olympics.



De Zerbi names his best Premier League team

Brighton manager Roberto De Zerbi has hailed Arsenal as the best team in the Premier League ahead of title rivals Liverpool and Manchester City.

The Gunners are locked in a three-way tussle to become Premier League champions with just three points separating current leaders Liverpool, runners-up Arsenal and defending champions Man City.

With a two-point cushion at the top of the table, Liverpool are arguably favourites as they look to lift the title in Jurgen Klopp's final season at Anfield.

The Reds have won 21 of their 30 league games this term and lost just twice – to north London rivals Arsenal and Tottenham.

Arsenal have mounted another title challenge after pushing Man City close last season, with Declan Rice and other summer additions helping Mikel Arteta's side amass 68 points and

boast the best goal difference in the league.

While currently third, it would be foolish to rule out a record fourth successive league title for Manchester City, who also have aspirations of winning back-to-back trebles under Pep Guardiola.

Despite rating Liverpool and Manchester City highly, De Zerbi has named Arsenal as the best team in England as he prepares his Brighton side to face the Gunners this weekend.

Asked if he believes Arsenal are the best team in the Premier League, the Seagulls boss said: "Yes.

"Liverpool are another great team with different characteristics and a different style. Man City are closer in style to Arsenal but I think when Arsenal play well, it's very tough.

"You can understand my words because Arsenal won 3-1 against Liverpool [in February], beat Man City at home and in the Champions League they are doing very well."

Van Dijk omits Ronaldo from list of toughest opponents

Liverpool's defensive stalwart, Virgil van Dijk, has omitted Cristiano Ronaldo from his list of toughest opponents faced, despite encountering the Real Madrid legend on multiple occasions.

Since his £75 million move to Liverpool in 2018, Van Dijk has solidified his status as one of the world's premier defenders, contributing to his team's successes in various competitions, including the Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup, and Carabao Cup.

Despite facing Ronaldo

in significant matches such as the 2018 Champions League final, the Portuguese star did not feature in Van Dijk's selection.

Instead, the Dutchman highlighted Lionel Messi, Erling Haaland, Sergio Aguero, and Olivier Giroud as his most challenging adversaries.

Speaking on The Rest Is Football podcast, Van Dijk elaborated on his choices, particularly praising the directness and strength of Erling Haaland, describing him as a modern-day striker who capitalizes on any defensive lapses.



"I would say Erling Haaland is a very difficult opponent, he is very strong, a modern-day striker," Van Dijk said.

"It's the directness. If you give them an inch then they

will punish you."

Regarding Sergio Aguero, Van Dijk emphasised the Argentine's ability to pose a threat from various angles and finishes, recalling a goal

scored against his former team Southampton that showcased Aguero's clinical prowess.

Despite Olivier Giroud's modest goal-scoring record in the Premier League, Van Dijk acknowledged the Frenchman's effectiveness as a link-up player, particularly in tandem with Eden Hazard.

"It's the same with Aguero. He didn't score many goals against us, but since I played against him when I was at Southampton he was always a handful, he could finish with his left or right, but you always had to

be at your best.

"I remember one goal he scored against us in 2018-19, he came in front of Dejan Lovren from a cross and finished it so quickly."

Van Dijk noted Giroud's ability to hold up play and score crucial goals against his teams.

While Ronaldo's absence from Van Dijk's list may raise eyebrows, the defender's selection reflects the diverse range of challenges he has encountered on the pitch, highlighting the unique strengths and strategies of each opponent he has faced.

Nigeria: Time to re-invent our democratic structure

Let us not forget, this year, 2024 marks the 25th of Nigeria's unbroken democratic governance, outside the iron-grip of military despotism. Ordinarily, we should have several reasons to celebrate such an historic achievement. That is, for those of us still lucky to be alive amidst the increasing challenges of blood-letting insecurity, economic hardship, the screaming storm of tribal sentiment and nepotistic appointments, and youth unemployment leading to the querulous 'japa syndrome'.

Not left out of course, is the low quality delivery especially considering the critical sectors of infrastructural development, education and healthcare delivery. The source of serious concern therefore, is whether these should be the "dividends of democracy" or not.

So, given the dark political background of the current system of government that deliberately foists preventable, economic hardship on the masses of the people, it is high time that we re-invented the political structure to favour the led majority. Put simply, the type of democracy we presently practise is not in our best interest and cannot propel the machinery of government forward. And that is because the government is not there as a protective and providing father-figure for those expected to be the greatest beneficiaries.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, democracy is a state governed under a system of government by the people, especially the rule of the majority. It also means that it is a government, especially one in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation, usually involving periodically held free elections.

While the word "democracy" has also been variously described as a system of government by the whole population, or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives", it is also perceived as a system of parliamentary democracy.

On his part, democracy was also echoed by the former US President, Abraham Lincoln (of blessed memory), as spoken at Gettysburg, to honour the

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It was about 500 BC that many cities adopted the Greek democracy, which was all together new in the history of the world. Their cities were small enough to enable the people to meet together and make decisions

-H.A. Clement (The Story of the Ancient World

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soldiers who sacrificed their lives in order to that "the government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

But as Nigeria spends its 25th year of unbroken democracy there are several questions literally begging for answers. Has the Human Development Index (HDI) vis-à-vis the quality of life of the average Nigerian improved or not over the past 25 years? Is he performing his duties under a safer operational environment? Has he access to more nutritious food and safe, potable water? Has he been able to provide such to all members of his family? Have the children benefitted from quality education and healthcare delivery? What, in specific terms can he point to as what the government has provided for him and members of his family over the decades? With the empirical evidences on ground is there guarantee for a brighter future for him and his siblings? Good enough, the answers to these questions are not far-fetched.

For instance, as at 1999 the poverty rate in Nigeria, according to the World Bank was 11.8% but it has since escalated to 38.8% in 2024. In the 2023 Global Hunger Index, Nigeria ranked 109th out of the 125 countries showing that the level of hunger is serious. While the number of out-of-school chil-

dren was put at 7.018million two and a half decades ago, it has jumped up to 20 million, according to UNESCO. Unemployment which refers to the share of the labor force that is without work but available for and seeking employment stood at 3.90% in 1999 but has gone beyond 5.76% as at 2024.

With all these disturbing statistics, there is clear evidence that the impact of governance on the quality of life of the citizenry, especially the poor has been on the negative side. That is not to say that there have not been some achievements made to improve on governance by the past administrations.

For instance, under the administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, there was establishment of the telecom sector, the commercialisation of NEPA to PHCN by unbundling it into 18 successor companies on 1st July 2005, the dualisation of some roads, the establishment of EFCC, the launching of NIGCOM and sending of high profile Nigerians to jail for corrupt practices. On a general note, there was the securing of life and property of citizens in line with Section 14 (2), (b) of the 1999 constitution as enshrined.

On his part, former President Umar Yar'Adua had a pragmatic vision on food security, wealth creation, transport infrastructure, power and energy. Others included land reforms, security, and education. But due to his illness and death, the administration was unable to realise his seven-point agenda.

But history will remember him as a man of peace by instituting the Amnesty programme for the Niger-Delta militants; and also a man of the people who reduced the cost of premium motor spirit.

Against all odds of the well-conceived listless lies connived against him by a crop of self-serving power poachers, it is on record that under Goodluck Jonathan's administration, Nigeria rebased its gross domestic product for the first time in over a decade. It thereby, became the largest economy in Africa by overtaking South Africa and Egypt. The Jonathan administration accrued over US\$454 billion while in office from oil revenue. Proceeds from Nigeria's non-oil exports rose to 2.97 billion by the end of 2013, up from 2.3 billion in 2010.

As a patriot and believer in a peaceful and



AYO OYOZE BAJE

Baje is Nigerian first food technologist in the media and author of 'Drumbeats of Democracy'

prosperous nation, he did his best by the promotion and practice of true democracy by creating an enabling environment. That was in addition to the conduct of free and fair elections in the country, including the 2011 poll which was adjudged to be the most credible election of its magnitude that has ever been conducted in the country, though it was not without its flaws.

Apart from the giant steps taken in the fertile field of agriculture that dealt a death-blow to the fertilizer merchants and dealing directly with the farmers at the grassroots he saw to the liberalisation of the press and guaranteeing the freedom of speech in a country where the stifling of the press and suppression of the.

The initiation of the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN) program succeeded in generating over 100,000 jobs for innovative unemployed youths across the country in the course of three years.

Under his administration, Nigerians became fully integrated into the international e-commerce community with the approval and re-inclusion of Nigeria as one of the Paypal-compliant countries.

But how do we assess the administration of former President Muhammadu Buhari within the context of the dictates of democracy and the current pitiable socio-economic quagmire being faced by millions of Nigerians? Time will tell.



IKEDDY ISIGUZO

Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues

MAJORITY of our leaders act like aliens in their scramble for Nigeria. They inspire each other with their uncommon craving for everything, including things they already have and will not need. They are not greedy. Their conduct is vastly worse than greed for it harbours an unquenchable desire for more at the expense of everything.

Nothing is sacred. Nothing is sacrosanct. They appropriate the law. They would cuddle lawlessness if it is the path to their famed unimportance. Then they brag about it.

Their motto appears to be to grab as much as they can before the party is over or ahead of one of their members. They do not believe in Nigeria.

A worse scramble than the scramble for Africa is on. If you understand it, you will not find anything strange about the conduct of those who lead the scramble. They care about their mission.

We are wrong to accuse them of not caring about Nigeria. They do. We see Nigeria differently. We care differently.

A fundamental mandate of governments in Nigeria, it seems, is to erect unbearable standards of suffering for the people. The competition to outdo each other in this sphere is high, intense, incredible and certainly crass. It is slightly matched by the scramble for Nigeria's resources. While at it, they brag, they spite us.

Their ostentatious living at our expense is an exhibition of their firm belief that "there is nothing you can do about it." How right they are. The hunger in the land has elevated ability to cater for one's family to a major achievement. We have no rooms left to think about the ploys of governments that have made it clear from the beginning that they are for themselves.

A political philosophy that officially admits that selfishness is legitimate remains the President's top shot at transparency. The ECOWAS President was happy as he congratulated 44-year-old Senegalese Bassirou Diomaye Faye who assumed office 10 days after the presidential election of 24 March 2024.

Transparency in Senegal, Uganda mocks Nigeria

No court indecisions, no votes were lost in the clouds, though the cost of conducting the election could be a fraction of what our INEC splashed on computers that only glitched once it was time to transmit results of Nigeria's presidential election.

Faye had been detained for "spreading false news, contempt of court, and defamation of a constituted body" following a social media post he made. A court ruling released him and made possible his participation in the election that he won with 54 per cent, leaning on the support of his ally Ousmane Sonko. He has announced Sonko as Prime Minister.

According to his asset declaration, released during his campaign, Faye trained in law, estate management, tax inspection. He has a house in Dakar, as well as land outside the capital and in Ndiagianiao, his village, and about \$6,600 total in his bank accounts. He has two wives; he brought both to the inauguration. He has four children. He told us. One of his wives has no child yet. It is public knowledge.

The schools he went to are known. His age, certificates, name, village, career records are all verifiable. He has started implementing his programme that will hit hard on corruption, create jobs, promote economic growth and transparency.

Senegal handled a simple matter of conducting an election simply, excellently. It did not empty divisions of its armies on the streets to intimidate voters though thousands died in riots to throw out Macky Sall's government that was attempting a third term. The opposition was not run out of chances by their INEC Chairman. There was no need for helicopters, sophisticated gun-boats and deployment of thousands of policemen to watch the election rigged. The computers did not refuse to upload certain results.

Waste of money at elections is an extension of the specialised businesses of our politics. The beneficiaries line up for their own cut of the deal unbothered about how a few billion Naira padded to cost of elections should deny anyone sleep.

Trust the President to mention transparency in his speeches. His asset declaration, if made, is not public. He reminds us that he is an economist, right in the middle of economic challenges that are tackled with applauses if the value of the Naira makes a most miniscule gain. The economist in the President saw him triple the cost of electricity without knowing that industries would pass the burden to consumers of their products.

Uganda has a different meaning for transparency. Its President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni Tibuhurwa, 78, has been in office for 38 years, and may stand for election again in 2026. His 50-year-old son General Muhoozi Kainerugaba Museveni who heads Uganda's armed forces, is the top contender against his father. He was a Minister, and an

Adviser to his father. One of his brothers-in-law is also in the presidential race.

His sister Natasha Karugire, 48, a University of London-trained Fashion Designer and Consultant, last week, in a Fool's Day prank, was announced as the new Governor of the Central Bank of Uganda. She is Private Secretary to the President of Uganda, his father, for Household Affairs.

Patience Rwabwogo, 46, pastor of Covenant Nations Church, another Museveni, seems not to hold any formal position in government. Her sister Diana Kamuntu, 44, "formally and absolutely renounce and abandon the use of the name Kamuntu and assume and adopt in place of that name the name Kyaremera," in 2022, marking her divorce with Kamuntu.

Hon. Ibrahim Ssemujju Nganda, a former journalist, now a parliamentarian, is more gracious in his praise of the sacrifices President Museveni, whose transparency, should be applauded, makes. "The President has sacrificed his family for Uganda," he said in a video that makes rounds of the social media, before listing Museveni who by birth and marriage hold top government positions.

Ugandans accept that "anything can happen" with Museveni. His 75-year-old wife, Janet, and mother of the four listed children, is a two-time Minister. Questions about her education have not stopped her from being Minister of Education and Sports since 6 June 2016. She was Minister for Karamoja Affairs for seven years and First Lady for 38 years. Longevity runs with the Musevenis. Their marriage is in its 51st year.

It is a country, but Uganda looks more like a Sole Proprietorship.

Why are the details of Uganda's version of transparency important? A comparison with Nigeria's is a waste of time, granted that time, the most expensive resource, is the cheapest thing in Nigeria.

How much of our President do we know? Someone said these things cannot happen in Nigeria. If they happen, how would we know? We know Museveni's children and in-laws. Is that level of transparency available to us in Nigeria? How then would we know if the President's son is Governor of the Central Bank? Would the Senate not approve the President's daughter if nominated as CBN Governor? All she would need is to "take a bow" if it would not inconvenience her. She could have read Fashion Designing, like Museveni's daughter or nothing. Her certificates could be muddled up or missing. These would not count.

We can laugh at Uganda or Senegal but the real joke is on us. Big as we are, we cannot count ourselves. We cannot

feed ourselves. We cannot contribute anything meaningful to improve the conditions of our people.

Our claims to expertise rest on electoral malfeasances, manipulation of laws, and mismanagement of public resources in frighteningly incomprehensible manners. We are experts at doing no good and bragging about it as our strategies for managing a country run on borrowed funds that are further mismanaged.

The judiciary is irredeemable gone. Lawlessness is the law. Conflicting judgements contend for places in our law books. Nobody has an interest in resolving them.

It should bother everyone that Nigeria is broke, almost incapable of paying its debts while still borrowing to fund lifestyles of those whose main interests in Nigeria are to get all they can and ensure that discourses about Nigeria lead nowhere.

Finally...

NOBODY should pretend to know the priorities of the President better than him. He approved N90 billion as subsidy for pilgrims. People are suggesting the money could build 10 power plants. Geometric is their benchmark. It is a surprise that people can confuse power plant for pilgrimage. Do they know how much prayer goes into governance? Prayer is no longer cheap. Of course, it is beneath the President to explain these things.

EFCC's current tangle with Bobrisky shows the agency has little to do. What crime is mutilation of the Naira when compared to billions that are reportedly stolen in the presidency, government houses, local governments, ministries and their agencies? What is the outcome of the investigation of Dr. Betty Edu? Has EFCC's case with Senate President Godswill Akpabio died? Is anything unique about Bobrisky's alleged mutilation of Naira? Now, EFCC does not know whether to address Bobrisky as "he" or "she". Good for the agency. Why not "it"?

IGNORE claims that peace is back in Rivers State. "His display of arrogance, obstinacy, and a conqueror-like attitude, or succinctly put in his words, "I will win them" has always deceived him to live in self-denial that it was a Mike we nurtured from political obscurity to national limelight who has now assumed a godlike posture to warrant him to appear on National Television to lambast us as those without integrity," Hon. Austin Okpara, former Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives on Nyesom Wike, FCT Minister. Wike's words for Rivers State Elders on his raging fights with Governor Sim Fubara are too unkind to be published here.