

Nigeria's 264 dams back in focus as nation pursues year-round farming

● **as dry season knocks**

BILL OKONEDO

Nigeria's dry season which typically lasts for five months (from November to March) is setting in, bringing with it concerns and prospects around food production, transporta-

tion and prices, in a year which has seen charges for both essentials rising astronomically and impacting cost of living.

The dry season also highlights the condition of Nigeria's 195,000-kilometre network of roads, (65 percent of which are unpaved) which are softened,

sometimes into disrepair by torrential rains, impacting transportation and the cost of goods and services, especially food.

The dry season also opens a window for reconstruction and repair of roads and for evaluation and impact of similar work done in the previous season.

Of particular concern as this year's dry season kicks off is the extent of the deployment of Nigeria's 264 dams for irrigation as the Federal Government undertakes to ramp up food production by boosting dry season farming under the National Agricultural Growth Scheme

Agro-Pocket (NAGS-AP) Project.

The First Phase of the Dry Season Farming was launched in November 2023. It focuses on the cultivation of wheat across 15 wheat-producing states, covering 118,657 hectares and involving 107,429 farmers.

Phase 2 of the Dry Season Farming was tipped to cut across all 36 states of Nigeria and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and cover staples including rice, maize, and cassava.

For rice, the target is 250,000

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The Nigerian Observer



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Zenith, GTB, 4 others pay N537bn tax in 9 months amid N3.2trn windfall

- **loans and advances hit N35trn**
- **personnel expenses surge by 85%**

TELIAT SULE

Amid a profit windfall occasioned by the humongous gains realised from forex, six deposit money banks in Nigeria have paid a total of N537.45 billion as tax to the Federal Government in the first three quarters of 2024. Their income during the period was further boosted by the hawkish stance of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) which raised the benchmark interest rate, the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR), to 27.25 percent in a bid to taper inflation.

The Nigerian Observer's analysis of the banks' nine months audited financial results for the period ended 30 September 2024 showed that the amount paid as tax represented an increase of 119 percent when compared to N245.39 billion the same banks paid as tax in the corresponding period of 2023.

The banks under coverage include the tier-one giants, Zenith Bank, First Bank, United Bank for Africa (UBA) and Guaranty Trust Holdings. The other tier-two banks are Fidelity Bank and Wema Bank.

The surge in banks' tax expenses came on the heels of the proposed windfall tax through which the Federal Government

seeks to tax bank's foreign exchange gains to the tune of about 50 percent. The floating of the Naira, which caused its value to depreciate from about N466 as of June 2023 to about N1600 as of September bolstered banks' earnings, especially those that have FX assets.

"It appears the FGN has looked to other countries that have also imposed a windfall tax i.e., a special tax imposed on specific industries where macroeconomic events have allowed players in the industry to recognise greater than average profits," Deloitte, one of the leading accounting and consulting firms in Nigeria, said in an assessment note of the policy.

"For instance, in May 2022, the United Kingdom introduced a windfall tax of 25% on energy profits. This was further increased to 35% in January 2023. Also, on 8 August 2023, Italy imposed a windfall tax on profits earned by banks from high interest rates to assist mortgage holders," Deloitte added.

Zenith Bank paid the highest amount of N175.56 billion as tax in Q3 2024, an increase of 147.8 percent when compared with N70.86 billion the same bank paid during the corresponding period of 2023.

Deeper dive analysis of its third quarter results showed that the bulk of the tax paid was corporate tax, N105 billion, followed by tertiary education tax, N29 billion. Others include infor-

mation technology tax, N8.3 billion, and national fiscal stabilisation levy, N5.7 billion, among others.

Guaranty Trust Holdings (GTCO) paid the second high-

est tax of N134.46 billion in the nine-month period ended September 2024. This amounted to an increase of 104.4 percent when compared with N65.79 billion paid in the same period

in 2023. The bulk of this payment was for company income tax.

FBN Holdings, the parent

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THANKSGIVING:

L-R: Managing Director, Edo State Public Building and Maintenance Agency, Engr Austin Osakue; former Chairman, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Felix Omobude; Archbishop, Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City, Most Rev. Augustine Akubeze, and Edo State Governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki, during a thanksgiving service to mark the end of Governor Obaseki's 8-year term as governor of Edo State and dedication of the Government House Chapel, in Benin City, on Sunday, November 3, 2024.

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Obaseki marks end of tenure with thanksgiving, celebrates achievements, successes

- **says his govt left enduring impact on education, health, agric, others**
- **dedicates renovated Govt House chapel, charges on love, unity**

HAPPINESS ULUMEFOH

The Edo State Governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki, on Sunday, led members of the State's Executive Council (EXCO), religious and political leaders and other stakeholders to a thanksgiving service to mark the end of his 8-year stint as governor of Edo State, acknowledging God and the people of the State for the government's successes and achievements over the last eight years.

He was joined by his wife, Betsy; Deputy Governor, Engr. Marvelous Omobayo Godwins; Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Blessing Agbebaku; Chief Judge of Edo State, Justice Daniel Iyobosa Okungbowa; Chief of Staff to the Governor, Dr. Osaigbovo Iyoha; candidate of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2024 governorship election, Dr. Asue Ighodalo and his wife, Ifeyinwa, among others.

The thanksgiving was done alongside the dedication of

the newly renovated Interdenominational Government House Chapel, in Benin City, the Edo State capital.

Others present include the Chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Edo State Chapter, Apostle Irekpono Omoike; Catholic Archbishop of Benin, Archbishop Augustine Akubueze; Chairman of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Edo State chapter, Pastor Mrs. Margaret Agbonifo; General Overseer of the Habitation Church of God and former Chairman of NLC, Edo State chapter, Rev. Olu Aderibigbe and the General Overseer of Covenant Church of God, Felix Omibude, amongst others.

Obaseki, who thanked the people of the State for the love and support to his administration over the last eight years, said his government has addressed the diverse needs of Edo people of the State and worked tirelessly to leave an enduring impact across multiple sectors including

education, healthcare, economy, infrastructure, and agriculture, among others.

He said, "As we gather here to dedicate the Government House Chapel to God and celebrate the thanksgiving service to mark the close of my term, I am deeply reminded of the many ways in which God has held us together.

"The ways which He has upheld our vision and helped us to accomplish the monumental task which he set before us. Over the past 8 years, my administration has been able to address diverse needs and improve lives and service delivery to Edo people.

"We have worked tirelessly to leave an enduring impact across multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, infrastructure, agriculture, and economic empowerment and many others."

Obaseki continued: "Today is a day of thanksgiving as God has been our source of strength and has guided us through every challenge and given us

victory in all our adversity. The renovation of this Chapel draws from my deep inspiration and inspiration of many other.

"I stand before you today not only as governor but conscious of the divine responsibility we all share to honour God in every area of our lives and our governance.

"This chapel stands as a physical symbol of that commitment; a commitment to build a State on a foundation of faith, unity and reverence for God Almighty. It's my hope and prayers that this Chapel will serve as a place where future leaders will seek the face of God and solace just as we have done."

Acknowledging the church and religious leaders in the State for their support over the last eight years, the governor stated, "I want to acknowledge our clergy for their steadfastness, moral support, and spiritual encouragement which helped us during our darkness hours. As we dedicate this chapel to God today,

may it serve as a reminder of his faithfulness and love and unending support for Edo State.

"Let this chapel be a place where leaders are grounded, where prayers for our people are lifted and where the vision for a brighter and prosperous future for every Edo citizen is birthed and nurtured."

He further charged, "We must continue to have faith. As my tenure comes to an end, I urge each

and every one of us to carry this vision of a State rooted in love, faith, and respect for one another. Let this place serve as a daily reminder of the divine calling upon our lives and inspire us to serve our community with passion and unwavering commitment."

"May this Chapel be a house of prayers for Edo State. May this be a sanctuary for future leaders of Edo State who will come to seek God's guidance," the governor prayed.

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hectares involving 500,000 farmers with the expected output of 1 million metric tons of paddy rice, according to information from Mr. Bayo Onanuga, Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy.

For maize, the target is 55,000 hectares with 110,000 farmers, thereby adding 165,000 metric tons to national maize production, while for cassava, the target is 35,000 hectares with 70,000 farmers to produce 525,000 metric tons of cassava.

However, industry watchers think government needs to ramp up action on the deployment of the nation's 264 dams for farm irrigation to facilitate year-round cultivation and harvests.

The Federal Government had said last October that it had concluded arrangements to partially commercialise all the dams under the nation's 12 river basins to enable them effectively deliver their mandates.

Prof. Joseph Utsev, Minister of Water Resources and Sanitation, had disclosed this while addressing newsmen shortly after inspecting the Tiga Dam in Bebeji Local Government Area of Kano State, but little has been heard of the project since then.

The minister had said that the commercialisation of the basins would enable them to generate more revenues for the Federal Government.

He gave the assurance that the huge infrastructure available at the basins would guarantee a return on investments.

Utsev explained that the exercise would ensure sustainable operations and management of the infrastructure at the dams.

"The basins have huge infrastructure like water supply schemes, dams, and irrigation that require good funding to be able to keep them running and to provide dividends for Nigerians," he said.

He said the Federal Government was ready to partner with commercial farmers to pave the way for massive production of assorted food crops in an all-year farming system.

Meanwhile, industry groups

have said that better attention to the nation's 264 dams which are currently poorly applied to crop irrigation would open a window to increasing food production and lowering prices.

"Farmers in Nigeria have been impacted by the lack of access to water to the extent that there is no real enabling environment for sustainable all-year-round agricultural production in the entire country," said Ibrahim Kabiru, national president of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria.

Despite the push for increased local food production, most dams across the country are still dysfunctional and irrigation schemes are not working, Kabiru said.

Experts say Nigeria's several dams will boost food production, lower prices to table and reduce dependency on food imports if properly serviced and managed.

They add that food production would increase significantly, as cultivation and harvesting could be conducted twice a year for some crops and three times a year for others, especially as many crops grown in the country, including maize, beans, tomatoes and other fruits, vegetables and some varieties of legumes mature in three months.

They say that dams that provide irrigation year-round would further attract investment into mechanised farming and food processing from home and abroad, as well as create jobs and encourage foreign exchange earnings from food and other farm produce exports.

Furthermore, they say, there would then be opportunities and incentives for increased levels of fish farming.

"The farmers will be better served by improvement in the utilisation of existing dams than even building new ones," Kabiru said.

Nigeria has a total of 264 dams with a combined storage capacity of 33 billion cubic metres (BCM) of water for multi-purpose uses, of which 210 are owned by the Federal Government, 34 by the states, and 20 are owned by private organisations, according to the Federal Ministry of Water Resources.



STAKEHOLDERS' MEETING:

L-R: INEC National Commissioners, Major Gen. Alkali Modibbo (rtd); Mrs May Agbamuche-Mbu, and INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, during a stakeholders' meeting with Civil Society Organizations at the Commission's headquarters in Abuja. PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

Zenith, GTB, 4 others pay N537bn tax in 9 months...

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company of First Bank of Nigeria Limited, paid N84.58 billion as tax, an increase of 150 percent when compared with N33.83 billion paid as tax during the same period in 2023.

UBA paid N78.17 billion as tax, representing an increase of 48.1 percent when juxtaposed with N52.80 billion paid as of September 2023.

Fidelity Bank paid N56.81 billion just as Wema Bank paid N7.88 billion as of September 2024, amounting to an increase of 195.3 percent and 174 percent respectively when compared with N19.24 billion and N2.88 billion the two banks

made as of September 2023.

All the six banks cumulatively realised N3.24 trillion as profit after tax as of September 2024, an increase of 103.1 percent when compared with N1.59 trillion realised as of September 2023.

GTCO made the most profit of N1.09 trillion, which is higher by 195.3 percent than the N367.42 billion realised as of September 2023. Zenith Bank realised N827.28 billion in Q3 2024 as profit after tax, an increase of 90.5 percent over N434.17 billion profit made in similar period in 2023.

First Bank realised N526.28 billion profit in Q3 2024 as against N230.05 billion in Q3 2023; UBA made N525.31 in

Q3 2024 as against N449.30 billion as of September 2023; Fidelity Bank made N224.60 billion profit as against N91.75 billion as of September 2023 while Wema Bank made N52.74 billion profit compared with N19.24 billion in Q3 2023.

Personnel expenses of the six banks under coverage rose by 84.6 percent from N397.68 billion in Q3 2023 to N734.09 billion as of Q3 2024. The highest increase in personnel expenses was at UBA whose employees received N225.42 billion as compensation compared with N111.11 billion in Q3 2023.

GTCO employees received N71.53 billion as against N37.58 billion in Q3 2023. Zenith Bank

paid its employees N150.67 billion in Q3 2024 as against N88.43 billion as of September 2023.

Fidelity Bank paid its employees N43.60 billion as against N30.31 billion in Q3 2023 while Wema Bank paid its employees N32.47 billion compared with N19.04 billion in the corresponding period of 2023.

Loans and advances administered by the six banks increased by 46.2 percent to N34.72 trillion as of September 2024 as against N23.74 trillion as of September 2023. This is against the deposits mobilised by the same banks which rose to N80.32 trillion compared with N52.22 trillion in the corresponding period of 2023.

NEWS

Tinubu, Akpabio, Uzodimma pour encomiums at Iwuanyanwu's funeral

● as Imo govt names IICC after late Ohanaeze leader

LORETTA ALFRED

President Bola Tinubu, Imo State governor, Hope Uzodimma, and other prominent Nigerians at the weekend described the late President of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide, Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, as a colossus of no mean proportion who lived a life of service to humanity and God until his last day on earth.

They spoke at a well-attended funeral service of Chief Iwuanyanwu at the Cathedral Church of St. Matthew, Atta in Ikeduru Anglican Diocese, where torrents of remarks from the high and mighty who attended the event pointed to a man whose legacy of service in his community, state, region and country speaks volumes.

President Tinubu, represented by the Secretary to Govern-

ment of the Federation, Senator George Akume, described Iwuanyanwu as one who served the country in many official capacities, noting that "the nation mourns him as an illustrious son of Nigeria".

"Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu was courageous, defiant of injustice, and uncompromising; he had the heart of a gladiator, resolute and indomitable," said Tinubu.

"Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu was enterprising, believed in Nigeria's human and material abundance and fecundity and his investments cutting across sectors and the nation attest to this. He lived a life of service with his wealth, served his people and the nation at large," he said.

Tinubu commiserated with Iwuanyanwu's family, the government and people of Imo State, and Ndigbo at large over

the loss.

In his address, Governor Uzodimma commended the late sage for his legacies in different aspects of life, saying Imo State owes Iwuanyanwu a lot for his contributions to the wellbeing of the people and the state.

To show gratitude to Chief Iwuanyanwu for his contributions to Imo State in particular, Governor Uzodimma named one of his ongoing ambitious projects, the Imo International Conference Centre (IICC) in Owerri, after the departed Ohanaeze leader.

He thanked his brother governors of the South East for coming together to provide leadership that made the funeral rites of Chief Iwuanyanwu seamless.

Uzodimma said that the gathering was not necessarily to mourn the late President General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide, but to celebrate a man who gave his life and resources to the service of God and humanity, emphasizing that "his legacies live on".

"He was a nationalist, a detribalised Nigerian, who had strong defining attributes, fighting for all to live together," Uzodimma said.

"He was a bridge builder, peace maker, pacesetter, accomplished father, a philanthropist and welfare. He was always there in times of need of the ordinary person.

"Iwuanyanwu's deeds will speak for him as can be seen in engineering, sports, aviation, media, banking, insurance, real estate and entrepreneur-

ship," he said.

Senate President Godswill Akpabio, represented by Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe, described Iwuanyanwu as "a trailblazer and friend of all who touched lives of people by being involved in different aspects of lives endeavour".

"Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu was a patriot, a nationalist, a detribalised Nigerian who believed in the unity of the country encompassed in justice, equity and fair play," he said.

Akpabio condoled with the family and all those affected by the demise of the President General Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide.

Earlier in his sermon, the Primate and Metropolitan of All Nigeria (Anglican Communion), the Most Revd. Dr. Henry Ndukauba, enjoined the congregation to serve the purpose of God in their lives.

He enjoined the Iwuanyanwu family to immortalize him by living as one united family even as he prayed that God will "raise another patriot who will lead Ndigbo honestly, sincerely, and selflessly".

Ndukauba advised President Tinubu to convoke a conference of the citizens of Nigeria to discuss issues concerning the welfare of the citizens.

He reminded the audience that there is God's purpose for every man and family, and that all humanity is created from one blood, enjoining all to endeavour to live a life of sacrifice "because after death there will be judgement before God".



COMMISSIONING:

L-R: Executive Director, MTN Foundation, Odunayo Sanya; Special Adviser, Broadband, Innovation and Technology, Lagos State, Ganiyu Oseni; MTN Director, Mrs. Mosun Belo-Olusoga; Education Director of Catholic Mission Schools, Monsignor Jerome Oduntan; MTN Director, Mr. Dennis Okoro; and School Administrator, Our Lady of Apostles Secondary School (OLASS), Rev. Sister Martina Mmagu, at the commissioning of the newly refurbished science laboratories at the OLASS in Yaba, Lagos.

Cybercrimes, hacking: Police arrest 17 Nigerians, 113 foreigners

NGOZI OKECHUKWU

The Nigeria Police operatives have arrested 130 suspects for cybercrimes and hacking. The suspects include 17 Nigerians and 113 foreign nationals, Force spokesman, Olumuyiwa Adejobi, said yesterday in a state-

ment, saying their activities threaten national security.

"This strategic operation was conducted through a coordinated raid on a building at the Next Cash and Carry area of Jahi, Abuja, where the suspects were reportedly using computers and other sophisticated devices to facilitate crim-

inal activities," he said.

"The operation which was led by the Assistant Inspector-General of Police for Zone 7 Headquarters, Abuja, AIG Benneth Igweh, on Saturday, 3rd November 2024, comprised officers of the Nigeria Police Force Zone 7 Command Abuja and the National Cyber

Crime Centre (NPF-NCCC)."

He said the Force is still investigating the matter, adding that the exhibits recovered from the suspects were being analysed scientifically.

Force spokesman added that the suspects would be charged to court upon conclusion of investigations.

Awosika, Anenih, others in Edo as Nigerian Women Leaders' Forum launches

ERHIRE ERHERIENE

The Nigerian Women Leaders' Forum (NWLF), a brainchild of the First Lady of Edo State, Mrs. Betsy Obaseki, was inaugurated in Benin City, Edo State, on Thursday, October 31, 2024, with the theme "Shaping Tomorrow: Empowering Women for Inclusive Governance, Transformative Leadership, and Lasting Impact".

The Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub on Airport Road, Benin City was a beehive as women from different walks of life across the country converged to rub minds on how to empower women to shape the future.

In her keynote speech, businesswoman, motivational

speaker and author, Dr. Ibukun Awosika, addressed "The Importance of Resilience in Building Legacy", offering an educational and transformative perspective.

Awosika emphasized the need for women to support one another instead of undermining each other, highlighting the inherent strength of women. Acknowledging the vital roles women play in nation-building, she urged them to take action.

"We have talked the talk; now it's time to walk the talk," she said.

Awosika stressed the importance of creating a legacy for future generations of women who aspire to be influential leaders in Nigeria, the continent, and the world. She reiterated that resil-

ience is essential for establishing a lasting legacy.

Delivering an inspiring speech detailing the origins of the Nigerian Women Leaders' Forum, Edo First Lady, Betsy Obaseki, said the Forum was born from her passion. She shared that although she intended to start the forum eight years ago, she faced fear and discouragement along the way. However, recognizing it as a divine movement, she felt compelled to establish it and expressed gratitude to her supporters who continually reminded her of the vision. She encouraged women to actively engage in politics and contribute to nation-building.

In a panel session that included Prof. Kokunre Eghafona of the Department of Sociology

and Anthropology, University of Benin; Rt. Hon. (Mrs.) Edeko Marie Omozele, Deputy Speaker, Edo State House of Assembly; Dr. Joan Osa Oviawe, Edo State Commissioner for Education, and Ukinebo Dare of MasterCard Foundation, the panellists shared their personal stories. They discussed the challenges, triumphs, and setbacks they faced in achieving leadership positions, motivating women to persevere in pursuing their dreams.

The event, moderated by the pioneer director of the John Odigie Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA), Ms. Imuwahen Ajoonu, had Isoken Aruede as the MC, while Iyom Josephine Anenih was the Special Guest of Honour.

Tinubu to swear in new ministers today

ESTHER OGBODO

The Presidency on Sunday disclosed that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu will on today swear in seven new ministers marking a significant development in his administration's restructuring efforts.

Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, made this known on his verified X handle. The new ministers, who were cleared by the Senate last week, will take their oath of office at the Council Chambers of the State House, Abuja.

The newly appointed ministers, who were nominated by President Tinubu a fortnight ago, include Dr. Nentawe Yilwatda as Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction; Muhammadu Maigari Dingyadi as Minister of Labour and Employment; Bianca Odinaka Odumegwu-Ojukwu as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

Other appointees are Dr. Jumoke Oduwale as Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment (Trade and Investment); Idi Mukhtar Maiha as Minister of Livestock Development; Yusuf Abdullahi Ata as Minister of State for Housing and

Urban Development, and Dr. Suwaiba Said Ahmad as Minister of State for Education.

According to Onanuga, "President Bola Tinubu will swear in the new seven ministers tomorrow Monday. The Ministers are: Dr Nentawe Yilwatda – Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction; Muhammadu Maigari Dingyadi – Minister of Labour & Employment; Bianca Odinaka Odumegwu-Ojukwu – Minister of State Foreign Affairs.

"Others are Dr Jumoke Oduwale – Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment (Trade and Investment), Idi Mukhtar Maiha – Minister of Livestock Development; Yusuf Abdullahi Ata – Minister of State, Housing and Urban Development and Dr Suwaiba Said Ahmad – Minister of State Education.

"The Senate cleared the ministers last week".

Last month's cabinet reshuffle by the President came after months of growing calls from Nigerians for change.

President Tinubu's administration has been working to address the country's challenges, and these new appointments are expected to bring fresh perspectives and expertise to their respective ministries.

Inside Edo

EDHIC trains volunteers to drive health insurance enrollment through new canvasser model

CHIDINMA KALU,
FOLUSEWA SIMEON AND
OLATOMIWA OYEDELE

The Edo State Health Insurance Commission (EDOHIC) has launched a training session for a team of volunteers, equipping them with essential knowledge and sales techniques to effectively promote the Edo State Health Insurance Scheme.

The training session held at the John Odigie Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOP-SA) aims at boosting the health insurance enrollment scheme across the three senatorial districts of Edo State.

The event marks the first implementation of the Canvasser Model within the state's health insurance programme, with the sole focus on driving a more grassroots approach to healthcare access and awareness.

At the training, the volun-

teers received a comprehensive overview of the categories of health insurance available, along with the criteria and exemptions involved. The primary objective of the session was to prepare them to engage directly with residents, providing information on the scheme and encouraging enrollment.

The training began with a session focused on the distinctions within Edo State's health insurance infrastructure. Volunteers were introduced to the EDHIC and the Edo State Health Insurance Scheme (EDOHIS).

It was explained that EDHIC established by law in 2019 is the governing body overseeing EDOHIS, and it plays a regulatory role ensuring the programme operates smoothly and reaches the people who need it most. While EDHIC provides oversight, EDOHIS is responsible for delivering affordable healthcare to Edo residents.

The training also covered the main components of the scheme which include enrollment, capitation, and care provision. The session highlighted how these three pillars interact to ensure healthcare accessibility. Through the commission, care is delivered by health service providers—hospitals and primary healthcare facilities—while those enrolled as “enrollees” under the insurance scheme can access these services when needed.

The volunteers were trained specifically to promote the scheme's paying plans, as opposed to its equity plans. The paying plans require payment, which supports the scheme's long-term sustainability, while the equity plans offer free coverage for certain demographics.

According to a representative of the commission, the equity plans are allocated based on a checklist of criteria designed to identify and assist those who cannot af-

ford healthcare services. However, volunteers will concentrate on encouraging residents to join one of the five paid categories: Student Plan; Gold Plan; Silver Plan; Bronze Plan, and Enhanced Plan.

Mr. Ekpen Odemwingie, the session's second trainer, provided insights into effective sales strategies. He emphasised the importance of building relationships with prospects as a first step, noting that health insurance is more readily accepted when a level of trust and familiarity has been established. He also stressed the need to understand specific audiences by knowing their demographics, buying habits, among relevant factors.

Dr. Owen Stephen Omorogbe, Director of Planning, Research and Statistics of the Edo State Health Commission, praised the new initiative and underscores the Edo government's commitment to expanding health insurance outreach.



EDHIC NEW CANVASSER MODEL TRAINING:

Newly trained volunteers of the Edo State Health Insurance Scheme (EDOHIS) pose for a group photo following their orientation on promoting health insurance enrollment in Benin City, weekend.

Any end to cultism in Edo?

OJEABULU AMANDA

Cultism in Edo State has been a persistent issue but took a new dimension since after the September 21 election, with various groups perpetrating violence and crime. Owing to this fact, some people refer to Edo State as “the home of Cultism.”

A lot of cult wars and clashes have taken place over the years, killing so many people, some of whom are innocent. Earlier this year, the Edo State Special Task Force on Anti-Cultism arrested 11 suspected cultists, including leaders of notorious groups, in a bid to curb the menace. This move is part of Governor Godwin Obaseki's efforts to restore peace and security in the state.

The task force has demonstrated unwavering commitment to ridding the state of cultism. Initial efforts focused on education and persuasion, engaging with communities and stakeholders to dissuade youths from joining cults. However, the task force has now shifted its focus to making arrests and prosecuting cult members.

Three suspected cultists were arrested within the Auchu Polytechnic community on August 7, 2024, massive show of force was conducted in Benin City on August 10, 2024, resulting in the arrest of two suspects and a key cult leader was arrested in the Ekosodin axis of Ovia North East Local Government Area on August 13, 2024.

The Edo government said a total of 129 cases of homicide and cult related crises were recorded in the state within two months (June and July). This information was disclosed by Governor Obaseki. In an effort to curb this menace, Governor Obaseki banned cultism in the state, making it clear that his administration would not tolerate it.

More recently, six persons were reportedly killed in a renewed cult-related crisis in Auchu and South Ibie communities in Etsako West Local Government Area. It was also learned that the fight that was initially between Eiye and Vicky

confraternities later involved Black Axe, causing the clash among Eiye, Vikys and Black Axe confraternities. This clash left several persons injured.

According to reports, the involvement of Black Axe ensued when one of the Black Axe members was mistakenly shot at a hotel during a misunderstanding between the two rival cult groups.

Two of the victims were reportedly killed on the 6th while four were killed between 8th and 10th of October, bringing the total number of victims to six.

Meanwhile, the alleged war of supremacy between cult groups reportedly engulfed a university community in the state. The students were said to have been writing second semester examinations when the cult war started.

In the course of the fight, one of the victims who was said to be a driver was killed on October 10th in broad daylight in the area.

It was gathered that his assailants after shooting him severally without bullet penetration, tied him to their vehicle and dragged him on the tarred road till he gave up the ghost.

When contacted the Public Relations Officer of the Edo State Police Command, SP Moses Yamu, confirmed the incident but didn't state the numbers of casualties.

Yamu said the situation has been brought under control and that investigation is still ongoing.

Some of the notable cult groups in the state include the Neo-Black Movement of Africa, also known as Black Axe, which allegedly emerged from the University of Benin. Other groups such as the Supreme Vikings Confraternity and the Eternal Fraternal Order of the Legion Consortium have also been linked to violent activities. These violent activities and constant clashes that always lead to deaths should encourage the young ones to steer clear of cult related activities. It is however surprising how cult clashes happen in Edo every month. The youths can do better.

Community elders absolve policeman of arms transfer, demand investigation

OSARETIN ERO

The elders and people of Ugbogiobo village in Ovia North-East Local Government Area along the Benin-Akure road have appealed to relevant authorities to wade into an alleged false allegation made against their son, ASP Festus Ediae, for allegedly providing guns and ammunitions to youths in the community to cause crisis.

The elders in a statement jointly signed by the Acting

Odionwere, Wilson Ehioghae, Peter Orumwense and Augustine Osakpamwan, who are both third and fifth in command in the community, said these allegations were made by one Owen Igbinovia said to be at large and an alleged impostor as Okaighele (Youth Leader) in the community.

Igbinovia had earlier this year reported ASP Festus Ediae to the Police authority, but it was gathered that investigation by the Police high command in Benin City, exonerated Ediae

of the allegation while Owen Igbinovia was subsequently arrested.

The elders said the latest allegation in a viral video where one Friday Imasekha, an indigene of Ugbogiobo, who was allegedly shot on October 19, 2024, in Ugbogiobo by Igbinovia led youths made the confessions but claimed to have done it under duress.

Part of the statement reads, “We, the elders view these spurious allegations weighty and capable of denting the

reputation of our son and other responsible indigenes of Ugbogiobo. Our son has been serving the Federal Government as a law enforcement agent with utmost diligence and respect for constituted authorities.

“We believe these allegations are meant to malign and bring to disrepute the personality of our sons, particularly ASP Festus Ediae, our son who they consider as their stumbling block in their criminal quest to further unleash may-

hem in our village where we have been forcefully sent packing by the erstwhile impostor okaighele.

“However, to prevent any misleading and misinterpretation of the video containing 212q the allegations as being culpable, we find it necessary to put the records straight.

“For the avoidance of doubt, there is no iota of truth in the video circulating in the social media alleging that our son, the Police officer, provides guns and ammunition to the

youths in Ugbogiobo.

“We call on the police high command in the country to carry out a thorough investigation on the false accusations levelled against our son by Owen Igbinovia who is currently at large in order to save our son's reputation”, the statement concludes.

The Edo State Police spokesperson, Moses Yamu, confirmed the incident and stated that investigation is ongoing to verify the claims made in the video.

People of Ekoken village celebrate boundary dispute victory at Appeal Court

MONDAY OISE

● **say it's an affirmation of Oba Ewuare's resolution**

The people of Ekoken in Uhumwode Local Government Area of Edo State, weekend, gathered in celebration of a Court of Appeal judgement that gave them

victory in a lingering boundary dispute between them and their neighbour - the people of Igueosagie village.

In their celebration, they assert that the Appeal Court

victory was only an affirmation of earlier resolution of the dispute in favour of the people of Ekoken by the Benin Monarch, HRM Oba Ewuare II.

According to the most el-

derly man in Ekoken, David Eguasa Uhumwangho, the two neighbours have been bound by the natural features of a moat from time immemorial as traditionally recognised in

Benin Kingdom.

But suddenly, Igueosagie people crossed the boundary deliberately, encroached on the land of Ekoken, and were illegally selling to unsuspecting developers unrestrained.

In the narration of the Okaighele of Ekoken, Billy Aimuavbosa Ugiagbe, "it has been a long walk, since 2005, when the Palace of the Oba of Benin first gave judgement in favour of the people of Ekoken.

"Again in 2018, after the withdrawal of the suit that was in the court in compliance to the directive of the Palace, HRM Oba Ewuare II resolved the dispute in favour of the people of Ekoken, stating that the natural features of the moat remain the boundary.

"Surprisingly, our neighbours, the people of Igueosagie refused to abide by the Palace resolution, and continued their unrestricted encroachment on our land.

"Even at that they again took us to court, where Justice Eboriemen based on the verifiable evidence presented, also gave judgement in our favour that according to the resolution of the authority of the Palace of the Benin Monarch, the traditional boundary of 'Iyanuwu' (boundary moat) should remain and be adopted by all the disputing parties.

"As usual, the people of Igueosagie in concerted efforts to illegally take over our land, took an appeal for about two years now.

"Probably sensing that the appeal may likely not be in their favour, they went back to the Palace of Oba Ewuare II seeking intervention. So, as customary, the authority of the Oba asked all the disputing parties to return to the court, especially when it was the same people of Igueosagie who instituted the appeal case.

"But fortunately, the Appeal Court has given judgement in the favour of the people of Ekoken; upholding the judgement of the lower court, and the earlier resolution of the Palace of the Oba of Benin."

Also speaking, one of the leaders of Ekoken, Nestor Amayo, corroborated the narrative of the earlier speakers.

The obviously elated people

of Ekoken said they have again been vindicated, urging that their neighbour should embrace the peace its groundwork has been laid.

They consequently sent a warning to developers and prospective buyers in the hitherto area in dispute; from 'Iyanuwu' (boundary moat) downward' to take note of the latest development.

The people of Ekoken also felicitated the Benin Monarch, HRM Oba Ewuare II in celebration of the feast of 'Emorho' (new yam festival), and on the occasion of his eighth anniversary on the throne.

Counsel to the people of Ekoken in the boundary dispute, Olayiwola Afolabi, SAN, gave a brief story of the case.

In the year 2005, HRM Oba Erediauwa first resolved the dispute in favour of his clients; the people of Ekoken, saying the Iyanuwu (boundary moat) a natural feature remains the boundary between the two villages. But Igueosagie people disobeyed.

Again, in the year 2018, HRM Oba Ewuare II adopted the earlier resolution of Oba Erediauwa in 2005 that the Iyanuwu (boundary moat) should be retained as the boundary between Ekoken and Igueosagie people.

"They again refused, they didn't want to obey the Monarch's resolution; they went to court.

"In 2021, Justice Eboriemen granted the court injunction order we filed; restraining the people of Igueosagie from trespassing the land of Ekoken people beyond the 'Iyanuwu' which serves as the natural boundary.

"In their usual character, Igueosagie people filed an appeal against that court restraining order.

"But they didn't come to court, and eventually, the appeal was struck out.

"So, the judgement of the Oba still remains; that the 'Iyanuwu' (boundary moat) is the natural boundary between the people of Ekoken and Igueosagie Villages.

"I want to use this opportunity to warn would-be buyers not to buy any inch of land in the area from the people of Igueosagie. If you do, you will be buying litigation," Afolabi warned.



COURT OF APPEAL JUDGEMENT:

Elders and people of Ekoken village in Uhumwode Local Government Area of Edo State, weekend, celebrate a Court of Appeal judgement that gave them victory in a lingering boundary dispute.

Corruption: Stakeholders to work with ANEEJ to strengthen anti-corruption reforms

EUBALDUS ENAHORO

To reduce corruption, stakeholders have agreed to collaborate with Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ) to strengthen anti-corruption reforms in Nigeria with the implementation of the Civil Society Advocacy to Support Anti-Corruption and Rule of Law (CASARN) project.

The stakeholders made their commitments to support the implementation of the CASARN project during an inception meeting of the (CASARN) project in Benin City.

The ANEEJ Executive Director, Rev. David Ugolor in his welcome address, said the CASARN project is designed by ANEEJ as part of the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption (RoLAC 11) programme, adding that the purpose of the meeting was to introduce the project to stakeholders and seek their collaboration to implement the project and deliver on set objectives.

According to Rev. Ugolor, who was represented by ANEEJ Programme Manager, Innocent Edemhanria, corruption remains a significant challenge to Nigeria's growth and development, its effects are far reaching, hindering economic progress, public service delivery and citizens' trust in governance.

"Today's gathering represents a pivotal step in our joint mission to combat these ob-

stacles through effective civil society advocacy, strategic partnerships and supporting institutional reforms.

"Nigeria is consistently being ranked as one of the most corrupt countries or territories in the world as evidenced by several transparency international corruption perception index reports in 2023 which indicate that Nigeria ranked 145 out of 180 countries and scored 25 out of 100 points.

"The situation in Nigeria is particularly worrisome as it appears that some powerful individuals can undermine the system and escape justice.

"Today, we see former governors resisting or evading arrest, some current governors have even challenged the constitutionality of the law that sets up EFCC, NFIU and others in court.

"We have also observed that some powerful politicians seem to have captured the judiciary, a good example of "State Capture. We have therefore reached the conclusion that it is better to prevent corruption than to allow it to flourish before fighting the scourge," he noted

The Executive Director of ANEEJ said The RoLAC 11 project is now being implemented by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) with funding from the European Union (EU), adding that, the goal of ANEEJ CASARN project is to contribute to reducing corruption in Nigeria through civil society

advocacy to strengthen systems, improve service delivery and support anti corruption reforms.

"Through the CASARN project, we seek to address corruption head on by working closely with government agencies, CSO, and the media to support critical transparency reforms and empower citizens to hold their leaders accountable.

"Some of the main target groups for the project include Federal and Edo State Government MDAs such as the Federal Ministry of Justice, ICPC, office of the Head of Service Edo State, Technical Unit on Governance and Anti-Corruption Reforms (TUGAR), Bureau of Public Procurement, Edo state government, and Edo State Ministry of Justice.

"Others include women and youths focused groups, persons with disabilities, other CSOs working on anti-corruption, transparency and accountability, budget monitoring, procurement monitoring among others, faith based organizations, religious and traditional institutions and media," he said.

In their various contributions during the meeting, participants which included representatives from government institutions, anti-corruption agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and media, the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), the Technical Unit on Governance & Anti-Corruption Reform (TUGAR), the Edo State Ministry of Justice, the Edo State Bureau

of Procurement, The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) alongside various CSOs agreed to support and work with ANEEJ to achieve its objective of reducing corruption.

Among those who shared insights and proposed strategies for achieving the projects objectives are The RoLAC State Coordinator, Uche Nwokedi; TUGAR Officer II, Ms. Favour Eze; Head of Regulations & Database/ICT Department, BPP, Adesina Mokuolu; Edo State Commissioner, ICPC, Mrs. Premo Ayaoge; and Head of Public Affairs, EFCC, Mr. Williams Osaghale.



The Programme Manager of ANEEJ, Innocent Edemhanria (standing) delivering the address on behalf of the Executive Director of ANEEJ, Rev. David Ugolor, during the inception meeting of the (CASARN) project in Benin City.

South-SouthReport

Oko-Jumbo calls for bye-election for vacant position in Rivers' assembly

ELIZABETH AGBOEGBULEM,
PORT HARCOURT

Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Victor Oko-Jumbo, has called on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct the requisite bye-election to fill the 27 vacant seats of defected members in the state House of Assembly.

The speaker said the renewed call became pertinent since the legal impediment stopping INEC hitherto from conducting the bye-election has been removed.

Rt. Hon. Oko-Jumbo made the call on Friday when he addressed a press conference in Port Harcourt.

It is common public knowledge that Martin Chike Amaehwule and 26 other lawmakers

of the Rivers State House of Assembly, on their own accord, defected on the 11th day of December, 2023, from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the All Progressives Congress (APC), without any justifiable cause, he said.

The speaker stated that their defection from the PDP, which sponsored their election, followed the former lawmakers' failed attempt to impeach Sir Siminalayi Fubara, as the Executive Governor of Rivers State, on the 30th day of October, 2023.

He emphasised: "To frustrate the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) from conducting a bye-election to fill the vacated seats in the Rivers State House of Assembly, Martin Chike Amaehwule & 26 others filed Suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/1681/2023

against INEC & 4 others on the 13th day of December, 2023.

"Subsequently, an order of Interlocutory Injunction was secured, restraining INEC from conducting a bye-election to fill the 27 vacant seats in the Rivers State House of Assembly.

"After filing the said suit and securing the order of Interlocutory Injunction, Martin Chike Amaehwule and 26 others began to foot-drag, and did not do anything to diligently prosecute their suit at the Federal High Court, Abuja."

Rt. Hon. Oko-Jumbo pointed to the futility of that legal suit that Martin Chike Amaehwule and the 26 others pursued, which they used, invariably, as a cover to delay what must necessarily be done.

Specifically, Rt. Hon. Oko-Jumbo said that on

Wednesday, the 30th day of October, 2024, Martin Chike Amaehwule and 26 others, without any reason, discontinued Suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/1681/2023, and it was struck out accordingly.

He declared: "The only impediment to INEC conducting a bye-election to fill the 27 vacant seats in the Rivers State House of Assembly was the order of Interlocutory Injunction restraining INEC from conducting a bye-election.

"Now that Suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/1681/2023 has been struck out, the order of Interlocutory Injunction is also issued.

"Accordingly, as the Rt. Honourable Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly, I call on INEC to forthwith conduct a bye-election to fill the 27 vacant seats in the Rivers State House of Assembly," he said.

Delta upscales funding for SMEs —Egwunyenga

● **says gov't BUP targets 2,000 business owners**

AJUWA VICTOR, ASABA

Delta State Governor, Sheriff Oborevwori, is taking bold steps to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through the MORE Biz-up Business Upscale programme meant to support entrepreneurs in the state.

Through the More Biz-Up initiative, the state government aims to provide funds to 2,000 verified business owners, boosting the state's economy, creating more jobs that would strategically position Delta as the nation's number one commercial hub.

Chief Job Creation Officer, Delta State Job and Wealth Creation Bureau, Comrade Ifeanyi Michael Egwunyenga gave the assurance on Wednesday, while speaking as guest of Orientation Panorama on Voice of Delta FM Radio Asaba, saying the state government will continue to support SMEs to cushion the effects of economic hardship threatening their survival.

He encouraged young entrepreneurs and small business owners to apply online at www.deltastatemorebizup.net, pointing out that the programme aims to provide equal opportunity for all Deltans, regardless of political, ethnic, or religious affiliation.

According to Egwunyenga, by supporting SMEs, Governor Oborevwori recognizes the significant role they play in job creation and economic growth, which is why he's helping SMEs to overcome challenges posed by macro-economic policies and interest rates, assuring that the Job Creation Bureau is committed to creating more jobs and wealth through government financial assistance and technical support to entrepreneurs.

He disclosed that eligible entrepreneurs must have Voter's Card or National Identification Number, NIN, have a business located in Delta State, and duly registered business with the Corporate Affairs Commission, CAC, as well as an active business account with any commercial bank in Nigeria.

He urged small and medium business owners to take advantage of the ongoing online application, so as to benefit from the Programme, adding that the portal, which opened on October 28, will close on November 1, 2024, emphasizing that applicants must be between age 21 and 45 years.

Egwunyenga assured that the Wealth and Job Creation Bureau will introduce more empowerment programmes in the near future, but that the ongoing More Biz-Up business upscale initiative captured the following business categories; Information & Communication Technologies, Computer and Smartphone Maintenance, and Building & Construction Services including Aluminium Profiling, POP, Interlocking, Tiling, Welding & Fabrication, Electrical & Solar Installation.

Other categories of small business to benefit from the first phase of the Programme are; Handicrafts - Fashion Design, Leather Works, Furniture/Woodwork, Hairdressing/Makeover, Event Management, Catering & Confectionery, Industrial Cleaning, Audio-visual Services; Cinematography, Photography and Graphics Design.

"Online application for the MORE Biz-up Business Upscale Programme commenced on 28th October to close on November 1, 2024.

"The state government is targeting 2,000 entrepreneurs between age 21 and 45 years old. This age bracket is very active. They are our target and other age brackets may be captured in subsequent empowerment programmes.

"His Excellency, the Governor of Delta State, Rt Hon Sheriff Oborevwori is driving the process, and he emphasized the need for transparency that provides equal opportunity for all Deltans, irrespective of political, ethnic or religious affiliation.

"We have put strategies in place to ensure that only those who are currently doing business with performance promise are selected to benefit from the MORE Biz-up Business Upscale initiative of the governor.

"Times are hard and governor Oborevwori clearly understands the harsh economic conditions faced by small business owners. This programme is to ensure that they remain in business, make significant progress, because the state government and people stand to benefit when businesses thrive.

"As a Bureau, we are fully prepared to deliver, serve the good people of Delta State by creating more jobs and wealth through deliberate financial assistance and technical support to visionary entrepreneurs in Delta State," Comrade Egwunyenga assured.



COURTESY VISIT:

Governor of Bayelsa State, Senator Douye Diri (l), and Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) administrator, Dr. Dennis Otuaro, when the PAP officials visited Government House, Yenagoa.

Bayelsa' ₦689.4bn 2025 budget focuses on project completion, economic boost

PHILIP EKE, YENAGOA

The 2025 budget (₦689,440,348,916.30) Governor Douye Diri of Bayelsa State presented last week to the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, christened 'Budget of Assured Prosperity', will focus on completion of major projects initiated in his first tenure as well as boosting the economy of the state.

Diri, who presented the budget during the plenary of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly on Thursday, said implementation of the 2025

budget would require some level of efficiency and synergy in government activities across ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs).

Giving the expenditure breakdown of the budget in some of the sectors, Governor Diri said ₦178,761,880,407.32 was for works and infrastructure; education ₦47,111,696,198.40 and ₦37,850,000,000.00 for sports.

The sum of ₦13,680,000,000.00 was budgeted for urban and housing development; energy and power got ₦14,450,000,000.00;

agriculture received ₦16,650,000,000.00; while security had ₦19,000,000,000.00; health ₦19,194,188,466.00 and community development ₦10,200,000,000.00.

The governor also noted that the overall outcome of the 2025 budget will significantly depend on the level of fiscal and recurrent policy coordination, adding that the government would pursue robust development as enunciated in the budget.

He said: "We have consciously crafted this 2025 budget in such a manner that

we are mobilising funds for human and capital infrastructural development initiatives, covering the seven core areas of the Assured Agenda which are agricultural rural revolution and blue economy; sports and youths development; security and peace; urban renewal and rural development; robust health care delivery; energy generation; economic growth and tourism; diversified education towards innovation and technology; by ensuring that our recurrent expenditure is kept within limits".

Funding critical for amnesty programme success —Gov Diri

PHILIP EKE, YENAGOA

Governor of Bayelsa State, Senator Douye Diri, has called for adequate funding of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) for it to function effectively.

Senator Diri made the call on Friday when he received the PAP administrator, Dr

Dennis Otuario and his delegation in Government House, Yenagoa.

Daniel Alabrah, Chief Press Secretary to Governor of Bayelsa State, in a press statement, said the governor, who stressed that funding was critical for the survival of the programme, advocated the need for state governments and National Assembly members

from the Niger Delta to collaborate towards addressing its funding challenges.

He said: "There is no place that will survive without funds. These are some of the issues that we as governors can also support you in ensuring that our National Assembly members make the contacts and synergise so that these issues will not be left for

you alone to handle."

He advised Dr Otuario to build linkages across relevant state governments within the region to ensure that the programme made meaningful impact, noting that the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) also faces similar challenges, which had affected its activities.

The Bayelsa governor ad-

monished those calling for the scrapping of the programme, saying the issues that led to its establishment were still prevalent.

According to him, despite the transition to renewable energy, crude oil production still plays a vital role in the nation's economy and advocated for continuation of the programme.

Giving a brief history of the armed struggle of the Ijaw people from the days of Jasper Adaka Boro, Diri said: "The Ijaws, for long, have been suffocated in a structure that they had given their all in terms of human and natural resources. Over the years, there has been a long cry of neglect and underdevelopment.

"The initial armed struggle in Ijawland basically fought for justice and development. The community called Oloibiri in Bayelsa State, where crude oil was first struck in commercial quantity in 1956, is now a shadow of itself. Nothing was ploughed back into Oloibiri that brought out all the trillions of naira for Nigeria.

"I like my brothers from other states to recognise that amnesty was not a gift to the Niger Delta but to bring succour to a people that had been abandoned."

While commending the previous administrators of

the programme for creating training centres across the region, the governor decried the vandalism at the training centre in Kaiama in Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of the state and urged Otuario to revamp it.

In his remarks, the PAP Administrator requested the support of the state government in the area of funding for its training programmes.

Otuario said the programme was at the rehabilitation and reintegration stage and there was need to consult with all relevant stakeholders to ensure its success.

He noted that from 2014, funding for the programme reduced by half while its scope was expanding, particularly when it has about 1,681 students in tertiary institutions in the country and 38 students studying abroad.

Otuario also disclosed that 98 maritime cadets have just been deployed within the country, stressing that there was a need to expand the programme to accommodate women stakeholders that are business-oriented.

He applauded Senator Diri for his administration's efforts in ensuring that Bayelsa remained peaceful, adding that Ijaw people were happy with the prevailing peace and security as Bayelsa is the homogeneous state for all Ijaws.



FOUR-DAY RETREAT:

Speaker of Delta State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Emomotimi Dennis Guwor (sitting in the middle) and other members during a four-day retreat for the review of the Delta State Fiscal Strategy Paper, FSP, 2025-2027.

Delta Assembly takes steps for realistic, implementable 2025 budget

AJUWA VICTOR, ASABA

The Delta State House of Assembly is poised to ensure the state budget for the 2025 fiscal year is result oriented, realistic and implementable in line with the developmental goals of Governor Sheriff Oborevwori-led administration.

The speaker, Rt. Hon. Emomotimi Dennis Guwor, who gave the assurance in his remarks at the opening session of a four-day retreat for the review of the Delta State Fiscal Strategy Paper, FSP, 2025-2027, said the House is desirous more than ever before to consider and pass an effective and efficient budget that is responsive to state issues, needs and aspirations of Deltans.

The speaker stated that it is gladdening to note that the governor has shown great vision and foresight towards ensuring the MORE Agenda is reduced to deliverables, assuring that the state legislature will never shirk its responsibilities to make it a reality.

He said, "This retreat with the theme: "Review of The Delta State Fiscal Strategy Paper (FSP) 2025-2027, is one of the strategic intents of the 8th Assembly to partner and collaborate with

the Executive arm of Government to accomplish the MORE Agenda of the administration.

"This of course is in furtherance of our Legislative Agenda, launched by His Excellency, Rt. Hon. (Elder) Sheriff Francis Oborevwori, Governor of Delta State at the 1st Anniversary of the 8th Assembly.

"As a House we are desirous to see to the comprehensive implementation of the MORE Agenda, through the instrumentality of people oriented legislation and the required collaboration and support as partners in progress.

"I personally attach great importance to this Retreat, because it provides an opportunity for Members of the House to engage the "engineers" that conceptualize the FSP document. It is also a partial fulfillment of our desire to have a pre-budget parlay with the Executive arm of Government."

The speaker expressed optimism that at the end of the Retreat, members will have a thorough understanding of the FSP document that will facilitate consideration of the Delta State Fiscal Strategy Paper (FSP) 2025 - 2027 in plenary.

"As we embark upon this timely review of the FSP doc-

ument, I urge you all to brace up and take advantage of the moment. Let us ensure that the State budgetary provisions, which is the end product of the FSP, aligns with the fiscal targets, on the strategic allocation of resources to sectoral priorities.

"As a House, our unwavering support, collaboration and cooperation with the Executive arm of Government is a defining feature of the 8th Assembly's Legislative Agenda, which is not optional but a collective responsibility.

"It is my earnest expectation therefore, that the outcome of this Retreat will further strengthen our collaborative relationship with the Executive arm of Government", he said.

Guwor commended the Management of the Delta State House of Assembly and its development partner, Africa Parliamentary Resource Centre, for their resourcefulness in putting together the Retreat.

Welcoming Lawmakers to the retreat, the Clerk of the House, Mr Oto Aghoghophia, said effective Legislature contributes to economic prosperity and improved social welfare of a people in a democratic society.

Mr Aghoghophia explained

that it was in recognition of that reality and awareness by the Management and Leadership of the House that informed the high-powered Retreat.

He said, "Today is symbolic and significant in that we have some Members of the State Executive Council as part of the Resource Persons that will facilitate some of the technical sessions of the programme.

"This is a conscious effort by the Leadership of the House to synergise positively with the Executive arm of Government to enhance service delivery to Deltans through effective and efficient Budget process.

"It is hoped that at the end of this Retreat, Honourable Members will gain insight of the fundamentals that resulted in the FSP 2025-2027".

The opening session had in attendance the twenty nine members of the State Assembly, the Secretary to the State Government, Dr. Kingsley Emu, Commissioner for Finance, Mr Fidelis Tilije, Commissioner for Economic Planning, Mr Sonny Ekadayen and President of African Parliamentary Resource Centre, Mr John Mutu, who is the lead facilitator the retreat.

Akwa Ibom PDP officers decry oppression by ward leaders

● threaten defection

PAULINUS NTA, UYO

Ward officers of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Akwa Ibom State have decried what they described as gross marginalization, oppression and usurpation of functions by the forum of PDP ward leaders, a group they described as unconstitutional.

According to a PDP ward chairman from Uyo Federal Constituency, the ward leaders, who are mainly former commissioners, former board members, and those who once aspired, but did not win elections to different political offices, have practically taken over their constitutional and political functions in their wards, leaving them redundant and irrelevant in the eyes of party members.

Sources from the government house said it is the nefarious behaviour of many ward leaders that has caused the delay in constituting and announcing supervisors long after the inauguration of the local governments.

According to one of these sources, most of the ward leaders, who are board members and other political office hold-

ers, nominated their children, wives, family members and close relatives, a development that has necessitated the cancellation of the supervisors list for a fresh one by the governor.

It is also gathered that a very few of the ward leaders have preferred to toe the path of integrity and justice, by respecting public opinion and fairness in the process of selecting supervisors at the local government.

Another ward officer confided in this reporter that during the local government electioneering campaigns, the ward leaders were given more prominence than ward officers of the PDP.

He however agreed that the ward leaders' forum was instrumental to the success of the party, but argued that the constitution of the PDP does not recognize such a body.

He however agreed that the group was instrumental to the success of the PDP during the last elections, but should not overwhelm other political groups that contributed to the emergence of the present state and local governments.

Finally, they threatened to defect to another political party if the power and constitutional integrity of the ward leaders is not restored.

EDITORIAL

Crude oil management and revenue leakages

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As Nigeria struggles to shore up her economy from a very low ebb, attention has been focusing on efficiency and transparency in the management of her major export and revenue earning resource, crude oil.

Nigeria's crude oil production quota for 2024 is 1.5 million barrels per day (bpd), as set by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). This is lower than its 2023 quota of 1.78 million bpd.

Nigeria has not met its OPEC supply quota since 2022. In the first five months of 2024, Nigeria fell short of its OPEC quota by about 42 million barrels, which could have resulted in a loss of \$3.57 billion in revenue.

The Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) allocates the Federation's share of oil production to either exports or domestic use. The domestic use component is called domestic crude allocation (DCA). Revenue from DCA is received in Naira, while revenue from exports is received in dollars.

In a nutshell, the more crude oil the nation exports, the more foreign exchange she earns and the better the economy, all things being equal.

Not long ago, former President

Olusegun Obasanjo in characteristic manner stirred the hornet's nest with a claim that over 80 per cent of Nigeria's crude oil is lost to thieves.

Obasanjo made the claim at the launch of a book, titled book titled 'Court and Politics,' and authored by Dr. Umar Ardo.

The former president said while the crude oil quota is about two million barrels per day, over 1.7 million are stolen.

While the figures reeled out by Obasanjo may appear farfetched, there is surely a great deal of theft of the country's crude oil going on.

In a similar vein, the Federal Government in November last year, revealed that more than N4.3tn worth of crude oil was stolen in 7,143 pipeline vandalism cases within a period of five years.

It disclosed this at the Nigeria International Pipeline Technology and Security Conference in Abuja, with the theme, 'Bolstering Regulations, Technology and Security for Growth.' The conference was organised by the Pipeline Professionals Association of Nigeria.

In a presentation at the conference by the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, (NEITI) a Federal Government agency, the organisation revealed that oil theft and losses in Nigeria

had become a national emergency.

The Executive Secretary, NEITI, Ogbonnaya Orji, said oil theft was an emergency that posed serious threat to oil exploration and exploitation with huge negative consequences on economic growth, business prospects and profit earnings by oil companies.

Providing data from the agency's reports to back his claims, he said: "NEITI disclosed that in the five years, 2017 to 2021, Nigeria recorded 7,143 cases of pipeline breakages and deliberate vandalism resulting in crude theft and product losses of 208.639 million barrels valued at \$12.74m or N4.325tn.

"NEITI reports also disclosed that during the same period Nigeria spent N471.493bn to either repair or maintain pipelines."

Orji pointed out that from NEITI's 2021 Oil and Gas Industry Report released in September, the sector accounted for 72.26 per cent of Nigeria's total export and government's foreign exchange, 40.55 per cent of government revenue, and provided 19,171 jobs.

"From NEITI's reports over the years, and recently insights from our membership of the Special Investigative Panel on Oil Theft and Losses, we are aware that oil theft is perpetrated mainly through pipe-

line clamping, illegal connections on major pipelines, exploitation of abandoned oil wellheads, pipeline breakages and vandalism of key national assets to illegally siphon crude into waiting vessels stationed in strategic terminals.

"These criminal exploits take place most times in atmosphere of communities' complicity and conspiracy of silence," the NEITI boss stated.

"As you are aware, illegal connections, pipeline clamping, etc, cannot be done by just anybody. And so, your association is largely complicit by failing to put in place stringent regulation and appropriate sanctions to check involvement of your members.

"For instance, NEITI has put in the public domain, empirical data of oil theft and losses at 619.7 million barrels of crude, valued at \$46.16bn or N16.25tn between 2009 and 2020.

"In addition, Nigeria lost 4.2 billion litres of petroleum products from refineries, valued at \$1.84bn at the rate of 140,000 barrels per day, from 2009 to 2018.

"Thus, the total value of crude losses between 2009 and 2020 is higher than the size of the country's foreign reserves and almost 10 times Nigeria's oil savings in Excess Crude Account," Orji stated.



BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IS BORROWED EVERY MONTH WITH NOTHING TO SHOW FOR IT. HENCE HIGH LEVEL POVERTY IN THE LAND

The Nigerian Observer
Cartoon Corner

...that the people may know

Avoid blowback effects of vulnerability with braving



HAPPY WORKSPACE

by **OLAYINKA OPALEYE**

A WELL-BEING SPECIALIST AND
CORPORATE WELLNESS STRATEGIST

We must have heard statements like these countless times: “Fake it till you make it” or “Not looking like what we’ve been through.” These interesting expressions are just a few responses to the shame or retribution that comes with vulnerability.

As the concept of vulnerability continues to gain significant attention globally, it is essential to acknowledge the potential risks and challenges associated with it, especially in the workplace. Several psychology and human development forerunners, such as Carl Rogers, Harry Stack Sullivan, Erik Erikson, James Pennebaker, Dan Goleman, and Shelley Taylor, were well ahead of Brene Brown. However, her extensive work from 2000 to date, which focused on shame, vulnerability, wholeheartedness, daring greatly, embracing uncertainty, and living with vulnerability, has been pivotal to reawakening this aspect of human connection. Regardless of the amount of attention with well-intended attendant effects it hoped to achieve, the concept has become the foundation of some people’s undoing. This is why there is a need to be aware of its dark side, which I would like to refer to as vulnerability blowback. It may inter-

est you that these blowback effects have been explored in Harvard Business Review, Forbes, and The Journal of Applied Psychology, which testifies to its actual existence, hence the need to tread with caution whenever you feel like being vulnerable.

To those wondering what this concept is all about, let me start by defining it. Vulnerability is the willingness to take emotional risks, be open, and be willing to surrender control despite uncertainty, potential harm, or rejection to build meaningful connections, foster growth, and cultivate authenticity. This control may be over our emotions, keeping certain things to ourselves, or revealing hard truths about our circumstances. The intriguing thing about this concept is that it reveals what may never be out there in the open if you never shared it, which brings us to the intention or rationale behind being vulnerable.

Why would anyone want to be vulnerable with deep and personal stuff, especially in this social media world where millions of people can easily judge you? After all, we all practice one form of vulnerability or the other daily, either by quick personal check-in with ourselves or family members. Here is why. Therefore, vulnerability

should be a tool for brokenness or humility, encouragement, and inspiration. This means that if you are not there yet, continue to wake up, make up, and show up until your time to truly shine comes. Vulnerability is delicate, and its intricacies can make it rather technical in the workplace.

I’ve heard stories of people confiding in someone at work becoming a clog in the wheel of progress of such individuals. As much as I don’t want to discourage practicing this form of openness, let me re-use Brene Brown’s BRAVING acronym to give tips on how to forge ahead with it.

Boundaries: Establish clear limits and expectations to protect yourself from exploitation, lack, or harm. Being open or sharing personal stories without setting boundaries is a recipe for disaster, especially at work or on social media. Take time to think through the limits to which you can share without giving an opportunity for resentment, condemnation, undue exposure, or outright exploitation.

Retrospect: Reflect on past experiences, including reactions from loved ones, to inform and improve future vulnerability. Take a breather and reflect on past experiences after sharing personal thoughts, stories, or insights to recall the other party’s reactions days, months, or years later. If you suffered retribution even from a loved one, then you may want to reassess what is to be shared or simply let it pass.

Aim: Clarify your intentions, goals

and target to ensure this form of openness is purposeful and directed to the right audience or person. Aimless sharing just for the sake of sharing is utterly worthless to the recipient and more costly to you.

Value: Recognize and honour your worth and the value they bring to relationships and interactions. Vulnerability should be humbling, which means you must have attained a certain level of overcoming yet helping others see that we are all humans after all, and things do happen. So, it’s better from a place of authority and value addition than flagrant disclosure.

Intention: Be mindful of your own motivations and ensure they align with your values and goals. Intention is critical because openness for all the wrong reasons or no reason at all is bound to backfire. Be sure to have good and pure intentions of value addition.

Necessity: Assess whether vulnerability is necessary and proportionate to the situation. Certain situations may warrant something other than sharing personal struggle et al. Your experience may be better deployed as a guiding or leading tool instead of full disclosure, which may become a distraction.

Goal: Focus on the desired outcome and ensure that vulnerability is a means to achieve it. Identifying the goal(s) to be achieved and staying the course without deviating until it’s done is paramount.

CALL TO ACTION

With this new version of BRAVING comes a complete template to guide anyone, especially leaders, team members, and co-workers, on how to carefully navigate vulnerability. Kindly send an email to oopaleye@gmail.com for the toolkit, which shows a step-by-step guide to sharing without shearing.

Opaleye, a wellbeing specialist and corporate wellness strategist, writes from Lagos, and can be reached at oopaleye@gmail.com

Tinubu’s perplexing aloofness to the real sector

PIUS MORDI

As grim as the report by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) on the state of the real sector is, it did not come as a surprise. The red light had been there for a long time. While the shut down of many manufacturing companies had been going on in the absence of a discernible strategy to prop up the fortunes of the real sector, all systems came off after the May 29, 2023, unilateral proclamation of President Bola Tinubu that upturned all projections and plans of the business community.

In its recent report, the MAN revealed that over 767 manufacturers had shut down operations and 335 became distressed in 2023 alone. In addition, unsold inventories amounted to N350 billion during the same period.

It’s not rocket science to understand why manufacturers that have been operating under 35 percent capacity still have their warehouses filled up. Despite having a huge population which the government touts in the refrain that Nigeria is a huge market for investors, the over 200 million population is impoverished with very low purchasing power.

What the Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise, Muda Yusuf, called “disturbing tendencies of overbearing regulatory dispositions, disproportionate sanctions, obstructionist actions, outrageous

finances and penalties, intimidation and high-handedness” encapsulate the tough operational environment manufacturers have had to contend with since the removal of petrol subsidy.

In the midst of crippling energy scarcity, the controversial Band A imposed on manufacturers has seen electricity tariff despite being grossly inadequate rise by 250 percent. This has seen energy cost rise to between 40 and 50 percent of the cost of production. This is the only country where such a single item takes up half of the cost of production.

Against the backdrop of the sustained complaint of manufacturers who are even threatening to get their members shut down operations, there has been no response from the federal government. Rather, the slew of tax increases continue with the latest being the proposal to increase Value Added Tax (VAT) to 10 percent from the prevailing 7.5 percent. If the debilitating factors against manufacturers continue unheeded, what are the parameters for the Federal Government’s claim that its ‘reforms’ are already yielding fruits and turning the economy around?

Last week, The Guardian newspaper carried a front page report where the desperate state of Nigerians was showcased. Reflecting the pervading sentiments of the people, it warned that as abhorrent as the thought is, more people are harbouring the wish that the military would intervene. Just two years ago, even

the man would not have entertained such a thought. Despite the scathing and disingenuous response from the presidency’s Bayo Onanuga, the situation is dire for Nigerians.

High exchange rate, high and multiple taxes, an impoverished population as poor infrastructure and logistic challenges make up the perfect storm for things to go wrong.

The tax hawks having a say and a way in Tinubu’s economic team should be made to take a back stage. Development economists should step up to the dire situation on hand.

Tinnubu should not allow himself to be lulled into lethargy and a false sense that things are turning around. It’s getting worse, Mr. President.

POSTSCRIPT

The Pointer @30

From the days of *The Nigerian Observer* under the old Midwest State, state newspapers held their own against the private media. From its humble beginning when Delta State was created, *The Pointer* has picked up the gauntlet and evolved into a

newspaper to be reckoned with.

Unlike its peers in other states, it has remained visible on the newsstands every day.

Thanks to the untiring efforts of previous general managers as Bosa Iwobi, a man that brought his invaluable private sector background in the newspaper business and Monday Uwagwu, the present team led by Godfrey Ubaka is keeping the flame aglow.

However, as Governor Sheriff Oborewori pointed out, there is still a lot of ground to cover, especially in boosting the visibility of the paper through the new media and online.

Notwithstanding, there is every reason for Ubaka and his team to roll out the drums. Happy anniversary, *The Pointer*.



Mordi, a veteran journalist/ columnist, writes from Asaba, the Delta State capital

Lessons from Ebie's reaction to court judgement affirming his NDDC position

It is no longer news that Justice Joyce Abdulmalik of the Federal High Court, Abuja, on Thursday, October 31, 2024, dismissed the lawsuit filed by some members of oil-producing communities in Bayelsa and Delta states seeking to nullify Mr. Chiedu Ebie's appointment as chairman, Governing Board of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), on the grounds that his emergence violated the NDDC Act.

The plaintiffs claimed in their suit that Ebie is not from an oil-producing area with the highest production quantum in the Niger Delta.

However, delivering her judgement, Justice Abdulmalik held that given section 24(2) of the NDDC Act, the plaintiffs had no locus standi. The section read, "Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law or enactment, no suit shall lie against any member of the Board, the Managing Director, or any other officer or employee of the Commission for any act done in pursuance or execution of this Act or any other law or enactment, or of any public duty or authority or in respect of any alleged neglect or default in the execution of this Act or such law or enactment, duty or authority, shall lie or be instituted in any court." It was on this premise that the court dismissed the suit in its entirety.

Indeed, while the judgement in the suit marked: FHC/ABJ/CS/28/2024, filed January 11, 2024, which saw no illegality in the appointment of Chiedu Ebie as the NDDC chairman and confirmed that Mr. President and the National Assembly acted within the ambit of the law, may have come and gone, the dust and

excitement the outcome elicited among Niger Deltans continue to resonate.

Essentially, Mr. Chiedu's reaction to the judgement added fillip to the excitement.

Aside portraying him as noble and a man of peace and with unalloyed respect for President Tinubu and the judiciary as an uncompromising dispenser of truth and justice, Ebie's reaction to the verdict, more than anything else cast him as someone that has no enemies to fight.

Ebie's reaction to the court judgement also portrayed him, in the estimation of right-thinking Nigerians, as a public officer not given to narrow mindedness or possessing divisive tendencies.

Beginning with respect for Mr. President and the judiciary, Ebie described the ruling as well-considered, intelligently delivered and courageously sound, noting, "The judiciary has once again proved that justice is never lacking in the Temple of Justice".

He expressed delight that the ruling has finally laid to rest every ambiguity, innuendo, half-truth and misrepresentation of facts surrounding the provisions of NDDC Act on appointments.

Ebie added that the judgement was a resounding watershed and underscored President Tinubu as a foresighted leader reputed for acting in total compliance with extant laws when it comes to appointments into public office.

As a people oriented leader, Ebie displayed uncanny sportsmanship and magnanimity in the face of victory. As wont many in his shoes, Ebie was not magisterial or triumphal; he never cast aspersions or draws more

battle lines via inflammatory statements or taunt his adversaries.

Rather than do all those, he dedicated the legal victory to God Almighty and all Niger Deltans of goodwill, and extended a hand of fellowship, calling on all critical stakeholders to join hands with NDDC governing board and management to consolidate the significant shift in the region's infrastructural and socio-economic developmental trajectory.

Ebie further stressed the need for a holistic and sustainable development of the Niger Delta region becoming overwhelmingly urgent, and urged all stakeholders to shun divisiveness and rally round the present management in sustaining the peace and harmony within the Commission.

"Looking at the level of peace and harmony that have existed among members of the governing board and management, I am confident that we will continue to excel and reach new heights of excellent quality service delivery to the region and its people," he stated.

"I call on all Niger Deltans to shun all forms of distractions through frivolous litigations that distract the Commission's governing board and management and, in its place, imbibe the virtues of commitment and other positive attributes needed for fostering peace and unity, promoting innovation for impactful strides for advancing development of the region," he said.

Ebie's people-centred and youth friendly leadership did not escape the attention of the Niger Delta Youth Council (NDYC) as the group, shortly after the judgement, rolled out the



UTOMI'S NOTE

JEROME-MARIO CHIJOKE UTOMI
A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE ADVOCATE

drums to celebrate his legal victory.

The youth group, whose membership cuts across all ethnic nationalities that make up the Niger Delta region, had earlier petitioned the Abuja Division of the Federal High Court, urging the learned justices to dismiss the suit for lacking in merit as the motive behind was a deliberate attempt to disrupt the progress and development of the region.

Addressing journalists shortly after the verdict, the National Coordinator of NDYC, Engr. Jator Abido in the company of other Comrades hailed the judgement as a win for the good people of Niger Delta who are in dire need of development following years of maladministration and neglect of the oil rich region, especially as it grapples with environmental degradation, pollution and loss of livelihoods.

On his part, Comrade Adodo described the judgement as "historic", adding that, "today, we celebrate the triumph of unity, fairness and justice. It is our earnest appeal to stakeholders in the Niger Delta region to desist from distracting our leaders. Dragging them from one court to another cannot help our region as all hands must be on deck to salvage our region from the many challenges besieging it"

And according to Comrade Apere, "the judiciary is indeed the last hope

of the common man. Today, our enemies have failed and those who seek to divide us are once again put to shame. The Niger Delta region cannot afford to be hijacked by a few selfish elements. It is now time to join hands and uplift our dear region".

In his brief remarks, Comrade Udoh Victor thanked Mr. President, the Senate President, the Attorney-General of the Federal for standing up against those he described as "the bullies that sought to hijack the people's common good". He assured President Tinubu of the support and loyalty of the Nigerian youths to his administration, as he pledged to work with NDYC and other youth groups to mobilise massively come 2027 in appreciation for the determination and courage shown towards delivering on the Renewed Hope Agenda"

Evidently, Ebie's reaction to his legal victory was not only exemplary but underscored the need for public servants to at all times exhibit leadership qualities worthy of emulation.

Utomi is the programme coordinator (media and public policy), Social and Economic Justice Advocacy (SEJA), a Lagos-based NGO

Arrogance of power: Hon. Ikwechegh in the firing line

JUSTIN UWADIA

Power can be seen as the ability to make that which should not have happened happen. Excessive use of power could be disastrous. This seems to exemplify the character of a former Council Chairman of Aba North Local Government Area of Abia State, now a parliamentarian.

On Sunday, October 27, 2024, a Bolt driver, Stephen Abuwatseya, was contacted by a vendor to deliver some food items to Hon. Alex Ifeanyi Mascot Ikwechegh in his Maitama, Abuja house. Hon. Ikwechegh is a member of the House of Representatives on the platform of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), representing Aba North and South of Abia State. In a viral video, the following ensued between Hon. Ikwechegh and Stephen.

Hon.: Do you know where you are?
Hon.: Do you know who I am?
Stephen: I don't want to know, Sir. Just pay me my money.

Hon.: So you think I will give you my money with the way you have spoken to me?

Stephen: I did a job for you and you have to pay me, Sir.

Hon.: You will not see penny from me.

Hon.: With this level of disrespect, you are very stupid, very very stupid.

Hon.: Madam, who is this stupid boy that you sent to this my house?

Hon.: Who is this foolish boy that you sent to my house?

Vendor: He is a bolt driver o.

Hon.: How can this stupid idiot come to my house and tell me that I

am supposed to come and meet him in his car and pick up snail that I am buying from you?

Vendor: He is a Bolt driver. How can he say a thing like that?

Vendor: I am so sorry. He doesn't know who you are.

Hon.: Can you imagine this rat?

Hon.: I can make this man disappear in the whole Nigeria and nothing would happen.

Vendor: Sorry, Sir.

Hon.: I am not going to give this boy one naira of my money.

Vendor: Please Sir, I am so sorry.

Hon.: No, no, no, no. I am not going to give this silly boy one naira of my money.

Stephen: You have been insulting me and I have been quiet.

Hon.: I pray that you do. I pray that you insult me.

Hon.: Can you please insult me.

Hon.: I am not going to call my policemen to beat you up.

Hon.: I will beat you up.

Hon.: I will show you that I am a big brother to you.

Hon.: I will slap the hell out of you and I will lie you down, lock you in my generator house.

Hon.: How dare you.

Stephen: Why should you do that?

Hon.: Who the hell; do you know who you are talking to?

Hon.: Do you know where you are?

Hon.: Because you saw me sitting outside here?

Stephen: It doesn't matter.

Stephen: Pay me, let me go.

Hon.: Look at this monkey, o!

Stephen: I don't care what I am.

Hon.: Are you looking at me, that you can beat me?

Hon.: Who the hell do you think you are talking to? (Hon. donates a slap to the Bolt driver).

Hon.: Do you know who I am? I am a Senator of this Republic.

Hon.: Do you know who the fuck I am? (Hon. generously distributes another slap to the Bolt driver, Stephen).

Hon.: How dare you.

Stephen: Are you slapping me, Sir?

Hon.: You see this place? You will suffer; I will deal with you.

Stephen: Are you slapping me, Sir?

Hon.: I just did. Slap me back.

Hon.: How dare you. How dare you. How dare you.

Hon.: Do you know who I am? How dare you.

Stephen: That is fine.

Stephen: Did you just slap me three times, Sir?

Hon.: Twice.

Hon.: The third one, you will soon receive it.

Hon.: How dare you.

Hon.: Come on, get out of this place.

Stephen: I need my payment, Sir.

Hon.: Come and collect it.

Stephen: Alright, this is where I am. I just got three slaps from this man here, just because I told him to come and get his stuffs and pay me my money. He is claiming that he is (Hon. interrupts).

Hon.: Tell them. My name is Hon. Alex Ikwechegh. I am a member of the House of Representatives. Tell them I slapped you.

Hon.: Call the Inspector General of Police. Call him. Let him come.

Stephen: Ok, Sir.

Hon.: Record me very well. Record me very well.

Stephen: Ok. Ok, Sir. That's nice.

Hon.: You came to my house to disrespect me.

Stephen: I didn't disrespect you. I said pay me my money and let me leave.

Hon.: Come on, keep that phone. (Hon. dashed at Stephen's phone).

Conclusion: Despite Hon. Ikwechegh's vituperations and bullying, there did not seem any iota of disrespect from Mr. Stephen against the legislator. Yet, after the assault by Hon. Ikwechegh, his policemen seized Stephen's car, bundled and detained him at a police station. This is a display of power.

However, a lawless society, especially where law enforcers or lawmakers turn lawbreakers, will sooner or later head towards anarchy. As Fidel Castro said, it is illegal to be law abiding in a state of lawlessness. Hon. Ikwechegh's Mike Tyson-like behaviour seems to be common among Nigeria's parliamentarians. Recall that in 2019, the youngest lawmaker then in the Upper Legislative Chamber, Senator Elisha Abbo, who represented Adamawa North Senatorial District, was caught on camera assaulting a woman at a sex toy shop in Abuja.

Unlike Abbo who, after the incident, returned to the shop in an attempt to cease the video footage, not sure if his show-of-shame was recorded, Hon. Ikwechegh knew Stephen was recording him, yet, he went on with his arrogance and assault and even belittling the office of the In-

spector General of Police and daring him. If not for his braggadocio, believing he was above the law, therefore, untouchable, Hon. Ikwechegh, seeing Stephen recording him with his phone, ought to be cautious with his actions and utterances.

But, no! Pride, pushed by the lucre of office as a House of Representatives member who earns over-bloated salaries and dubious allowances, Mascot, downplayed the power of the social media and continued with his verbal diarrhoea and attack.

So, Hon. Ikwechegh had the power to make Stephen disappear from Nigeria? Hon. Ikwechegh is a lawmaker and not a magician or from the lineage of Moshod Abiola, aka Professor Peller, the most famous Nigerian magician in the 1970s. How many people has Hon. Ikwechegh disappeared or sponsored their disappearances? No doubt, there are many cases of missing persons in Nigeria. Does Hon. Ikwechegh have a hand in them?

Apart from assaulting Stephen, Hon. Ikwechegh was ready to be engaged in fisticuffs and threatened to lock the Bolt driver in his generator house, probably for Stephen to die from generator fumes. Hon. Ikwechegh also called Stephen a monkey. This is racism or a racist on the prowl, masquerading as a lawmaker. There are many grounds on which to bring this lawmaker-turned-lawbreaker, Alex Ifeanyi Mascot Ikwechegh, 44, to book

Uwadia, an administrator/columnist, writes from Benin City, the Edo State capital

NAICOM sacks African Alliance Insurance's board, appoints interim management

VIVIAN OKAFOR

The National Insurance Commission (NAICOM) has sacked the board and management of African Alliance Insurance Plc, one of Nigeria's oldest life assurance companies and went ahead to appoint an interim management to oversee the affairs of the company.

This announcement was made by Segun Omosehin who is the Commissioner for Insurance and chief executive officer.

"As the primary regulator of the insurance sector, NAICOM has taken over the Board and Management of African Alliance Insurance Plc, effective today, 30th October, 2024," Omosehin said.

He revealed that the decision followed an extensive monitoring and review of the company's financial condition, governance, and operational practices, stressing that the review revealed significant concerns regarding its ability

CONTINUES ON PG 12»

Ibom Air expands fleet with two new Bombardier CRJ 900 next-gen aircraft

ONYNYECHUKWU UGWOKE

Ibom Air has bolstered its operations with the acquisition of two additional Bombardier CRJ 900 next-generation aircraft, registered as 5N-CED and 5N-CEE, thus bringing its total fleet size to nine and reinforcing its commitment to enhanced connectivity and reliability, the airline,

which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Akwa Ibom State Government, announced this new development on its X handle, formerly Twitter.

"We are delighted to welcome these two new CRJ 900 aircraft to our fleet. With this addition, Ibom Air now operates a total of nine aircraft, including two Airbus A220-300s and seven CRJ 900s. Still, we

are not resting because to become a serious scheduled carrier, we need to keep growing our fleet," Ibom Air said.

"And so, we eagerly await the deliveries of our nine remaining Airbus A220-300s from Airbus in the next 3 years. These two new CRJ 900s were outright

CONTINUES ON PG 12»

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Nigeria set January 2025 as launch date for \$5bn Africa Energy Bank

ERHUVWU ETARHIENYO

The Federal Government of Nigeria has scheduled January 28, 2025, as the launch date for the \$5 billion Africa Energy Bank in Abuja, Ambassador Nicholas Ella has disclosed.

Ambassador Nicholas Ella who serves as the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Petroleum Resources and as Nigeria's Executive Board Member at the African Petroleum Producers Organization (APPO), made the disclosure during the 19th Executive Board meeting of APPO, which was held in Yaounde, Cameroon, last week.

Ellah reaffirmed Nigeria's determination to APPO's principles and the prompt establishment of the energy bank, which seeks to address funding gaps within Africa's oil and gas sector.

"I am pleased to address the Executive Board (EB) meeting on this very important subject matter - the takeoff of the Africa Energy Bank Headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria," Ella said.

"As you are no doubt aware, the Headquarters building (of the Africa Energy Bank) was inspected by the Technical Team on 24th May 2024, and renovation works for its completion are ongoing. Nigeria is fully committed to delivering the building with furnishing to the bank in good time. We have the full support and cooperation of Mr

President and our National Assembly to actualise this project in Nigeria," he added, according to the Leadership newspaper.

It should be recalled that in July 2024, Nigeria was announced the winner of the hosting rights for the Africa Energy Bank (AEB) headquarters, after a competitive bid which involved Ghana, Algeria, South Africa, and Benin Republic. The bank is being sponsored in collaboration with Afreximbank.

The ambassador went on to elaborate on Nigeria's preparedness for the establishment of the bank, stating the bank's commencement of operations will coincide with the 38th anniversary of the African Petroleum Producers Organization (APPO), an alliance of 18 members aimed at enhancing Africa's energy sector. This new bank is being created through a collaboration between APPO and the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank).

While giving further update, Ambassador Ella reminded the attendees that the Federal Executive Council of Nigeria approved the hosting of the Bank on June 25, 2024. He pointed that "ratification of both the Charter and Headquarters Agreement are in an advanced stage. In its decision, the FEC also approved and endorsed the Establishment Document of the AEB and instructed the Attorney General and Minister of Justice to commence with

the process of ratification.

According to Ella, the Attorney General has concluded the process in September 2024 and has sent the AEB to the president for assent. "The Attorney General concluded the process on 9th September 2024 and transmitted the AEB Establishment Documents, which are currently with His Excellency, the President for his assent and which will be forwarded to APPO immediately.

"Apart from the earlier payment of \$59,120,000:00, an additional \$10 million was paid into the APPO Account by the FGN (Nigeria) last week. We intend to make full payment before the bank takes off.

"Nigeria wishes to advocate for the establishment and funding of the Africa Energy Bank as part of APPO's budgetary plans. This initiative would not only address the financial needs of the energy sector but also provide a platform for mobilising investments in oil and gas projects, which are vital for Africa's economic growth and development," Ella added.

APPO Secretary-General Dr. Omar Farouk Ibrahim confirmed that 50 percent of the necessary funds for the launch of the AEB have been obtained.

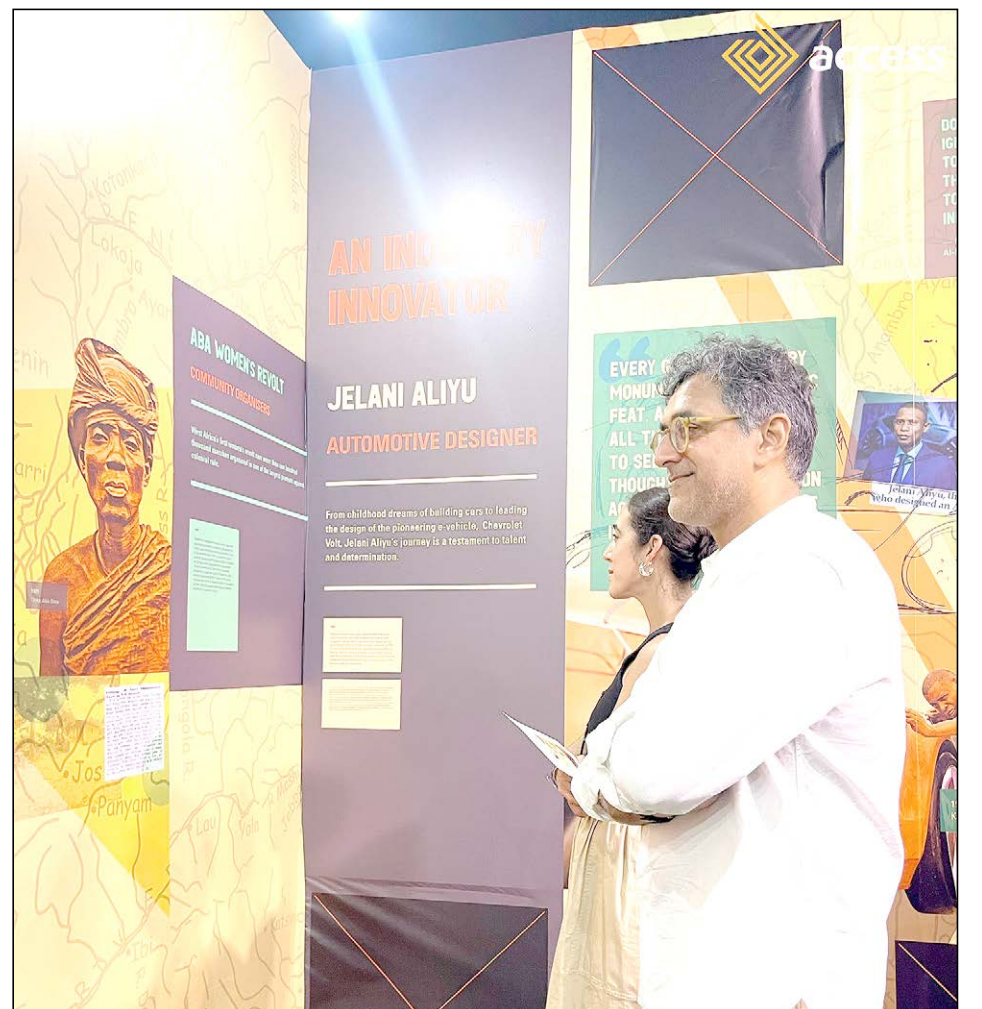
"I would like to urge APPO member countries to keep up the tempo for the Bank's take-off," Ibrahim said. Ibrahim further explained that the bank would include three classes of share-

holders, with APPO and Afreximbank as top shareholders.

Hisham Ahmed Selim,

Egypt's representative on the APPO Executive Board, characterized Nigeria's update as

"encouraging," recognizing the country's efforts in establishing the bank.



ARTXLagos2024: Art enthusiasts at the ARTXLagos2024, an art exhibition sponsored by Access Bank.

STANBIC IBTC'S PROFIT HITS N182.8BN IN Q3 2024

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EQUITY TRANSACTIONS ON NGX HIT N3.968TRN IN Q3'24 AS DOMESTIC INVESTORS MAINTAIN DOMINANCE

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WHY BANK FRAUD IS ON THE RISE IN NIGERIA PART 2

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FBN HOLDINGS LAUNCHES ₦149.6BN RIGHTS ISSUE

-Pg 14

Stanbic IBTC's profit hits N182.8bn in Q3 2024

HAPPY OSAGIE

Stanbic IBTC Holdings Plc has recorded a remarkable 180 per cent rise in net interest income, fueled by the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) aggressive rate hikes in 2024. The bank's financial report for the nine months ending September 2024, filed with the Nigerian Exchange Limited (NGX), shows

strong performance across multiple revenue streams despite a challenging economic environment. The bank's after-tax profit grew by 67.3 per cent, closing at N182.8 billion, compared to N109.2 billion recorded in the same period of 2023.

The surge in profitability was driven by a significant increase in interest income, which rose to N425.7 billion from N184.5

billion in the previous year, as Stanbic IBTC capitalized on the high-interest rate environment. However, interest expenses also rose sharply by 171.3 per cent, reaching N173.9 billion from N64.1 billion. The CBN's monetary tightening, with a cumulative increase of 850 basis points in 2024, has pushed the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) to 27.25 per cent

as of September 2024.

This has significantly increased the interest charged by banks on loans, boosting Stanbic IBTC's revenue. The bank's trading revenue also saw a boost, growing to N80.2 billion from N59.7 billion, primarily driven by activity in fixed-income securities and currency trading. Fees and commission income surged 58.9 per cent to

N134.3 billion, up from N84.5 billion in the previous year, with asset management fees accounting for 54 per cent of this total. Notably, brokerage and financial advisory fees grew by 133 per cent, and foreign currency service fees rose by 126 per cent.

However, Stanbic IBTC reported an impairment loss on financial instruments amounting to N59.3 billion, a significant shift from an impairment write-back of N9.95 billion in 2023. The rising cost of doing business in Nigeria, driven by inflation and energy disruptions, also impacted the bank's operating expenses, which increased to N183.5 billion from N123.1 billion. Despite these challenges, Stanbic IBTC's business activities generated substantial cash flow, with net cash from operating activities rising to N1.84 trillion, compared to N406 billion in the same period of 2023.

Net cash flow from investing activities, however, was negative at N405 billion, largely due to capital expenditures and fi-

ancial instrument purchases. The bank also made strides in debt management, repaying N119 billion in borrowings and N44 billion in debt securities, while paying dividends totaling N56 billion. As a result, net cash flow from financing activities amounted to N107 billion, and cash and cash equivalents for the period increased by 129.3 per cent to N1.9 trillion from N837 billion.

Stanbic IBTC's total assets grew by 37 per cent, reaching N7.2 trillion, driven by a rise in loans and advances to N2.42 trillion from N1.77 trillion. Deposits and current accounts grew to N3.46 trillion from N2.49 trillion, while total shareholders' funds increased by 33.7 per cent to N630 billion. Ultimately, the bank declared earnings per share of N1,390 in the first nine months of 2024, up from N825 per share in the corresponding period of 2023, reflecting its strong financial performance amid a tough economic climate.



WOMEN'S BASKETBALL LEAGUE:

Zenith Bank's officials in attendance as MFM won the 2024 Zenith Bank Women's Basketball League final. The final match was played between MFM and Nigeria Customs.

Transcorp Group posts 133 per cent revenue growth in Q3 2024

OLUWATUNMISE OMOSEYIN

In its recently released financial statements for the third quarter ended 30th September 2024 to the Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX), Transnational Corporation Plc. (Transcorp Group), Nigeria's leading listed conglomerate, showcased an impressive performance amidst a challenging economic landscape. The Group recorded a remarkable revenue of N298 billion, representing a staggering 133 per cent increase from N128 billion achieved in the same period of 2023.

The significant revenue growth was complemented by a dramatic rise in profit before tax, which surged by 303 per cent to N105.5 billion, com-

pared to N26.2 billion in Q3 2023. This exceptional performance reinforces Transcorp's solid positioning in Nigeria's business environment and highlights the success of its growth-driven strategy.

In the statement, total assets for the Group grew by 29 per cent, increasing from N530 billion in December 2023 to N684 billion in Q3 2024. Shareholders' funds also saw a 34 per cent increase, rising from N187 billion in December 2023 to N251 billion in Q3 2024, driven primarily by profits retained within the business.

Operating expenses increased by 38 per cent to N32 billion in Q3 2024, up from N23 billion in the previous year, reflecting the broader impact of

inflation on operational costs. Additionally, net finance costs stood at N12 billion up from N10 billion in Q3 2023, a consequence of rising interest rates.

Owen Omogiafo, President/Group Chief Executive Officer of Transcorp Group, attributed the Group's exceptional performance to its commitment to innovation and operational excellence.

She stated, "We are proud of our consistent year-on-year growth. This remarkable financial performance is a reflection, once again, of our vision and spirit of execution. As we approach year end, we will focus on enhancing operational efficiency, investing in high-growth sectors, and delivering long-term value to our share-

holders. We are investing for the future, particularly in the energy and hospitality sectors, delivering for our shareholders and our nation."

Transcorp is one of Africa's foremost listed conglomerates, with strategic investments across the power, hospitality, and energy sectors, driven by its mission to improve lives and transform Africa. The group's power businesses, Transcorp Power Plc. and Transafam Power Limited, contribute over 20 per cent of Nigeria's installed power capacity. As Transcorp Group continues to navigate a complex market environment, its impressive financial results underscore its commitment to growth and operational excellence.

Ghana urges common currency for West Africa to ease fuel imports

OGHENEFEGOR EKREBE

Ghana is asking for a shared currency among West African countries to make it easier to buy fuel from the Dangote Petroleum Refinery and to help with other business deals.

Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, the Chairman of the National Petroleum Authority in Ghana, spoke at the OTL Africa Downstream Energy Week, organized in Lagos. He pointed out that relying too much on the dollar is hurting local currencies and making them lose value.

Abdulhamid explained that Ghana needs dollars to buy fuel from the Dangote refinery, and

Nigeria will also need dollars if it wants to buy from Ghana.

He talked about how countries in the petroleum industry need to work together. Even if they have different political views, they should try to agree on a plan that helps everyone trade with each other.

"Fortunately for us, the entire continent now has an Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement that allows us to collaborate among ourselves in terms of trading, not just in petroleum products but in all other products. However, if Ghana is going to import petroleum products from Dangote Refinery, for example, we would still have to pay Dangote refinery in dollars," he said.

He also added that if Nigeria runs low on fuel, it might have to buy from Ghana, but they would still need dollars to do that. He believes it doesn't make much sense.

"It is our demand for dollars to import petroleum products that puts pressure on our various currencies and also drives petroleum product prices upwards. Now that Nigeria has a deregulated petroleum regime, for example, the major factor that is going to be responsible for driving up petroleum prices in Nigeria will be the currency, because importers would need more dollars to import petroleum products," Abdulhamid said.

He said Ghana would require \$400m monthly to import petro-

leum products, adding that "now I can imagine how much Nigeria will need for the importation of its petroleum products. Where are the Nigerian petroleum importers going to find the dollars? You will only put too much pressure on your currency."

He called for countries to work together, not just in the petroleum sector but also at the government level to improve fuel systems and economic policies.

He said Ghana would like to buy fuel from the Dangote Refinery once it reaches a capacity of 650,000 barrels per day because Nigeria wouldn't use it all. He believes this is better than getting fuel from faraway places like Rotterdam in Holland.

NAICOM sacks African Alliance Insurance's board,...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 11

to continue operating in a safe and sound manner, which has for some time now generated a lot of uncertainty over claims settlement and payment to annuitants under the company.

"The Commission has therefore appointed an Interim Management Board to manage the affairs of African Alliance Insurance Plc. The Board will oversee the company's operations, ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and implement necessary reforms," he added.

The members of the interim board include Haruna Mustapha who chairs the board; Jacob Erhabor who will act as the chief executive officer.

Other executive members include Wasiu Amao, the Executive Director, Technical; Oremeyi Longe Executive Director, Finance; Anthony

Achebe, Non-Executive Director, and Halimatu M. Khabebe, Non-Executive Director.

The Commission stated that it will work closely with all stakeholders, including annuitants, policyholders, employees, and investors, to minimise disruption and ensure continuity.

NAICOM further stated that "The objective of this takeover is to protect the interests of African Alliance Insurance Plc's annuitants, policyholders, other stakeholders, and the broader insurance industry, while ensuring the company's return to stability and compliance."

The Commission assured that it is committed to maintaining the stability and integrity of the Nigerian insurance industry.

"Our actions today demonstrate our resolve to address concerns and protect the annuitants, policyholders and public interest," Omosehin said.

Ibom Air expands fleet with two...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 11

purchases financed through a shareholder loan," it said.

Their addition will bring more capacity to Ibom Air's service offerings, facilitating better connectivity and reliability for travellers.

Ibom Air, a Limited Liability Company, wholly owned by the Akwa Ibom State Government, is committed to setting the benchmark, as the airline of choice for passengers. It operates a fleet of nine aircraft: seven Bombardier CRJ 900s and two Airbus A220-300s.

Ibom Air serves six domestic destinations and Accra, Ghana, even as it focuses on schedule reliability, on-time departures, and excellent service.

Like other members of the

CRJ Series family of aircraft, the light weight and advanced aerodynamics of the CRJ900 NextGen regional jet combine to deliver improved efficiency and reduced operating costs compared to other aircraft in its class.

Since the launch of the earlier-generation CRJ900 aircraft, enhancements to the CRJ900 NextGen aircraft have resulted in up to 5.5 per cent fuel burn reduction.

In addition to offering significant fuel cost savings per aircraft, as well as outstanding operational flexibility, the CRJ900 NextGen aircraft provides customers with an improved experience that includes excellent legroom, bright cabins resulting from large windows and LED lighting as well as large overhead bins.

Equity transactions on NGX hit N3.968trn in Q3'24 as domestic investors maintain dominance

Laju Uwanikone and
Faith Aigbe

The Nigerian Exchange Limited (NGX) has reported a substantial rise in equity trading values, reaching a record-breaking N3.968 trillion in the first nine months of 2024. This impressive figure marks a 46 percent increase compared to the N2.712 trillion traded during the same period in 2023, underscoring the strength of domestic investor participation in Nigeria's financial markets, Arise TV reports.

According to the NGX's latest Domestic and Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) report, domestic investors dominated trading activity, contributing N3.271 trillion, or 82.44 percent of the total trading volume, while foreign investors account-

ed for N696.88 billion, making up 17.56 percent. The report also noted that foreign inflows amounted to N310.99 billion, while foreign outflows were higher, reaching N385.89 billion.

The report reveals strong performance among domestic investors, with retail investors leading the charge. Retail investors traded N1.739 trillion worth of stocks, surpassing institutional investors, who contributed N1.531 trillion. The robust participation of retail investors reflects growing confidence in the market and increasing interest from individuals across Nigeria.

In September 2024 alone, total transactions on the NGX surged by nearly 30 percent month-on-month, reaching N493.01 billion (\$307.84 million) compared to N379.52 billion (\$237.70 million) in

August. This surge represented a remarkable 66.67 percent increase year-on-year from September 2023, when transactions totaled N295.80 billion.

A closer analysis of domestic market trends reveals that retail investors played a key

role in the market's growth. In September, retail transactions soared by 59.42 percent, climbing from N180.72 billion in August to N288.10 billion, while institutional transactions rose by a more modest 15.69 percent, from N141.33 billion

to N163.50 billion.

The month's data also highlighted a significant shift in foreign and domestic investor dynamics. Domestic transactions increased by 40.23%, from N322.05 billion in August to N451.60 billion in September.

Meanwhile, foreign transactions declined by 27.95%, from N57.47 billion (\$35.99 million) in August to N41.41 billion (\$25.86 million) in September, as foreign investors adopted a more cautious approach amid global economic uncertainty.

MTN Nigeria posts N4bn profit in Q3 2024

Audu Akhere Jennifer

MTN Nigeria, the country's largest telecommunications operator, has announced a tremendous turnaround in its financial fortunes, posting a N4 billion profit in its third-quarter financial results, thereby boosting their profitability up to 88 percent from the previous quarter.

The company's impressive performance and record, driven by growth in data and digital services, underscores its resilience in a competitive market. MTN Nigeria's strategic focus on expanding its 4G network coverage in fostering more quality services and investing in network infrastructure has yielded positive results which now makes them hedge over its competitors in the telecommunication industry.

"We are pleased with the progress we've made in the quarter. Our focus on data and digital services has paid off, and we're confident that our continued investment in network infrastructure will drive future growth," Karl Toriola, CEO, MTN Nigeria, said.

"Our commercial momentum drove broad-based growth across all revenue segments,

demonstrating the underlying strength and resilience of the business. We recorded an increase in service revenue of 33.6%, which was ahead of the average inflation rate in the period. This growth was led by data and supported by voice, fintech and digital services.

"We recorded a 9.8% increase in voice traffic and a 42.1% increase in data traffic. In addition, data usage per user grew by 31.2% to 11.3GB, supported by the rising demand for data and digital services, which has contributed to revenue growth," MTN Nigeria stated.

MTN Nigeria's strong Q3 performance positions the company for continued growth in the Nigerian telecoms market. With its expanded 4G network coverage and innovative services, MTN Nigeria is well-placed to maintain its market leadership.

MTN Nigeria's Q3 results demonstrate a strong recovery from previous losses. The company's focus on data and digital services has yielded positive results, with data revenue growing by 33.3 percent year-on-year. The expansion of 4G network coverage and investment in network infrastructure are expected to drive future growth.



PLANTING MANGROVE TREES:

L-R: Environmental and Sustainability Specialist, Dangote Industries Limited, Adeyemi Adun; Baale of Akodo Ise, Ibeju-Lekki, Chief Shittu Lateef Temitope; Special Adviser to the Governor of Lagos State on Environment, Rotimi Kunle Akodu; The Onise of Akodo Ise Land, Oba Ganiu Adebowale Adegbesan; Vice President Oil and Gas, Dangote Industries Limited, D.V.G. Edwin; Group Chief HSSE & Sustainability, Dangote Industries Limited; James Adenuga; and Trustee, Eco-Restoration Foundation, Prince David Omaghomi at the event.

Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry collaborates with firms to boost agric technology

James Ogbomo

The Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), in collaboration with Autodex Nigeria Limited, Afreximbank, and various stakeholders, has launched the inaugural Farm, Food, and Allied Technologies Expo 2024, Voice of Nigeria reports.

Dr Emeka Obegolu, President ACCI disclosed this during a media briefing in Abuja while announcing the upcoming inaugural Farm, Food, and Allied Technologies (FARMFATECH) Expo 2024 billed to hold on the 5th to 7th November 2024 at the National Stadium, Abuja.

Dr Obegolu, represented by the 1st Deputy President of ACCI, Adesoji Adesugba, said the Expo, organised by the ACCI in collaboration with Autodex Nigeria Limited, Afreximbank, and other key stakeholders and sponsors, aims to bring together industry stakeholders to foster cross-border partnerships and technological growth in the agriculture sector.

He noted that the expo will foster innovation and strengthen partnerships between Nigeria and China, even as the event will bring together participants from 76 countries, showcasing over 500 exhibitors and expecting an impressive 500,000 visitors.

"The three-day FARMFAT-

ECH Expo is an ambitious initiative focused on creating lasting global partnerships, notably between Nigeria and China, alongside other prominent players in agricultural technology.

"With over 500 exhibitors and an anticipated 500,000 visitors, this Expo is designed to foster international partnerships, facilitate knowledge exchange, and catalyze substantial business transactions that will drive growth within Nigeria's agricultural sector."

Adesugba said the Expo will offer a unique platform for presenting cutting-edge agro-mechanization technologies and food processing innovations to a global audience.

He said, "FARMFATECH provides an exclusive opportunity for everyone from farmers and manufacturers to investors and technology enthusiasts to engage with groundbreaking tools and techniques that are revolutionizing food production and management.

"Through our four dynamic Centres; the Business Entrepreneurship and Skills Technology Centre (BEST), Abuja Trade Centre (ATC), Nigerian Chamber of Commerce Dispute Resolution Centre (NCC-DRC), and National Policy Advocacy Centre (NPAC) alongside 16 trade groups, ACCI is committed to supporting key sectors of the economy, including agriculture."

Norrenberger Group lists Islamic, Turbo Funds on NGX

Oluwatunmise Omoseyin

Norrenberger Group, an asset management firm, marked a significant milestone with the listing of its Islamic Fund (NIF) and Turbo Fund (NTF) on the Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX) last week.

In a statement released by NGX, both funds are collective investment schemes (CIS) registered by the Securities and Exchange

Commission (SEC) and The NIF is designed for investors with a short to long-term investment horizon who prioritise adherence to Shariah principles, while the NTF is a mutual fund focused on fixed income assets such as bonds.

During the closing Gong Ceremony at NGX, Norrenberger's Acting Managing Director, Pabina Yinkere, described the listing as a significant milestone for the organisation. He emphasised that the listing would enable

the asset management firm to broaden its reach by providing diverse investment solutions through its mutual funds.

Yinkere stated, "For the Islamic fund, the objective is to invest in an ethical way, to invest in line with the principles of Islamic finance. But generally, it's not only for Muslims or people of the Islamic faith. Anyone can invest in it because the overriding fundamentals of this fund simply mean that you are investing

in an ethical manner, in instruments that do not support gambling, pornography, crime, or the dealing in ammunition."

He further explained the purpose of the Turbo Fund, noting that it provides an avenue for investors to access markets that may be out of reach for many individuals. "Both funds are top performers in their respective categories. Since we started these funds, they've consistently ranked in the top quarter of performance," he added.

Jude Chiemeka, CEO of NGX, commended Norrenberger for enhancing the market by introducing additional instruments in the realm of Islamic finance. "We have 63 mutual funds listed on our exchange, which reflects our commitment to creating opportunities for retail investors. There are now five Islamic products listed," he noted.

Chiemeka highlighted the importance of Islamic finance, particularly through the issuance of

Sukuk, stating, "Islamic finance has helped the federal government through the issuance of Sukuk. Over a trillion naira has been reached on this market and we can see the effect of the funds that have been raised as they have been trying to refurbish most of the roads that we use in the country."

He urged retail investors to consider mutual funds as a viable investment option, especially given the current inflation and interest rates in Nigeria.

Why bank fraud is on the rise in Nigeria Part 2

OSEZELE ILUOBE

According to Aristotle, “Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution.” The methodology to be used to curb fraud and fight against fraudulent activities “popularly known as 419” in the bank must be intentional. One must determine to look at so many parameters, such as domain names, IP addresses, currency or phone numbers. This data will then be anonymized by researchers to perform a statistical analysis of their findings.

As of the third quarter of 2023, the Nigeria banking sector has lost over N9.5 billion to electronic fraud underscoring the pressing need for proactive measures in the face of escalating cyber threats. Some cybercrime experts have suggested many ways of reducing the upsurge in e-banking fraud in Nigeria.

The experts said the National Assembly should propose relevant bills such as Cyber Security and Information Protection Bill and Electronic Transactions Protection Bill that could eliminate or reduce electronic fraud to the barest minimum.

They advised the Central

Bank of Nigeria (CBN) should issue operative guidelines to the banks and to be reviewed to regulate e-banking services in such a way that suspicious transactions could be reported seamlessly to its financial intelligence. The banks should be mandated to deploy advanced tools and technology, which could adequately protect customers against falling prey to fraudsters, considering the overreliance on telecoms service providers for basic services. There should be provision of automated analysis tools that could identify and report fraud attempts in a timely manner.

The experts called for deployment of deep learning by management of banks. The expert said “Deep Learning is a new approach to machine learning and artificial intelligence which are good at identifying complex patterns and characteristics of cybercrimes and online fraud.”

“There is an urgent need to review the internal audit functions of banks to include fraud risk analysis and management, while the internal control mechanism should be strengthened through adequate investment in training of staff in cyber security, online audit fraud detection and management.

“There should be regular rotation of bank employees to frustrate collaborative fraud. The regulatory institutions and banks should organize workshops, seminars and public lectures for bank customers on how to escape various e-banking frauds. The banking industry should review the existing Bank Verification Number (BVN) framework with the introduction of BVN watch list.”

Also, there should be frequent review of customer KYC (Know Your Customer) information. The customer BVN should be link to the National Identification Number (NIN). This will help the bank to track the customer in case his/her account is used to perpetuate fraud in the bank.

In the new age of digital services such as online banking and digital payments, the frequent reoccurrence of fraud looms larger over the Nigerian banking sector. Cyber criminals continuously evolve their strategies to exploit various financial services, posing substantial risks to both financial institutions and their clientele. Protecting against fraud is paramount to forestall financial losses, safeguard reputations, and maintain operational efficiency.

“Fraud detection involves the protection of customer and corporate data, assets, accounts, and transactions. It hinges on the real-time analysis of user activities. This sophisticated fraud detection mechanism operates through server-based processes that meticulously examine user actions and behavioural patterns or transactions. The goal is to compare these actions with predefined profiles of expected behaviour,” the expert said.

To pre-empt electronic fraud in the financial institutions in Nigeria, attention should be given by the financial institutions to institute regular training programmes aimed at enhancing fraud awareness among their staff. Cyber criminals often target bank employees through insidious techniques such as phishing and social engineering.

“It’s paramount to educate the workforce on the art of recognising potential fraudsters and impart the knowledge of what steps to take in the event of suspecting a compromise,” he added.

Furthermore, institutions must maintain a vigilant eye on employees with account access, being watchful for irregular activities such as unauthorised access, transactions outside regular working hours, and anomalous fund transfers.

alously fund transfers.

The banks must pay attention to internal fraud, reminiscent of insider threats. To mitigate this risk, stringent policies governing individuals, processes, and practices must be put in place, adding “For effective execution, the Chief Information Security Officer (CISO)/Chief Information Security Manager must be well-versed in their roles, wielding both knowledge and practical experiences and benchmarking against industry best practices during policy implementation.”

As a financial institution, establishing and maintaining a comprehensive database containing information about known and emerging threats is highly paramount to help facilitate service hardening, noting that “Gathering data on fraud from both internal and external sources allows banks to garner a profound understanding of the ever-shifting fraud landscape.” Moreover, such a database can serve as a valuable resource for employee training, enhancing their ability to identify potential fraud or threats.

The emergence of new scams doesn’t mean the old ones are gone. Some people will still try to use the tried-and-true methods of stealing from banks. If you haven’t already done so, implement fraud prevention for empty-envelope deposit scams, forged and fraudulent documents, forged checks, fraudulent loan applications, and wire transfer fraud.

The bank should form the habit of ATM scans, checks and cash deposited. You can also require a waiting period after an ATM deposit before the customer can withdraw cash from a deposit.

Although it’s not new, wire transfer fraud is increasing. Training and education prevented most of these fraud attempts from succeeding.

Preventing wire transfer fraud can be done by training your employees on how to verify the authenticity of wire requests. One way is to make a phone call to the number listed on the account to verify that the account owner made the wire transfer request. For large amounts, it’s especially important to use more than one method of verification.

While phishing and social engineering schemes have been around for a few years, they’re still a huge problem. In fact, fraud management states that as much as “75% of fraudulent online banking payments activity originates from trusted accounts on trusted devices,” which means that customers have been duped into making these payments.

“The best way to prevent phishing attacks from hooking victims is to teach people what to look for and to always be wary before clicking on a link in an email or a text.” After the initial training, follow up with frequent reminders. People are often in a hurry when replying to email and need to be warned

all the time. You may also want to include a warning like this one with emails sent from all external email addresses: “CAUTION: This email originated from outside our organization. Think before you click!”

Social engineering scammers use fear and other emotional tactics to trick people. Again, “education is one key to preventing this kind of fraud. Make sure your employees and customers know they should never give any personal information to a stranger, no matter how they present themselves and no matter how urgent it seems.” Legitimate companies won’t ask for such information over the phone or by email.

Another way to prevent fraud is to use sophisticated software that monitors transactions such as AI and machine learning to detect unusual activity on accounts and thus possible fraud. Make sure your online and mobile banking provider has such third parties incorporated into their system.

Also, someone at your institution should also be monitoring reports manually, looking for suspicious activity, such as the number of failed attempts when trying to log into the account. The fraud monitoring systems mentioned above only monitor the fraudsters’ activity, once they’ve gotten into the user’s account, so manually reviewing reports is a way to stop fraudsters from getting into the account to begin with.

Alert customers when there is suspicious activity involving your customers in fraud prevention by alerting them whenever unusual activity occurs on their account. You can ask them to opt-in or just automatically alert them when, for example, a charge on their credit card originates in a location far from their home. Because electronic fraud is so pervasive now, you may even want to offer an alert for customers any time their card is charged.

Also develop a multi-layered security system that is effective. An effective strategy to prevent and detect bank fraud requires a multi-faceted approach, involving administrative, physical, and technical controls: At the administrative level, financial institutions should devise policies, procedures, and guidelines to minimize risk. These may encompass security education and awareness programs and robust password management policies.

According to Bernard Shaw, “progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” A well-structured fraud detection strategy should not unduly disrupt a user’s experience unless their activities raise legitimate suspicions. The banks need to strengthen their cyber security, educate their employees and customers, and invest in the right technology. These will help them to stay ahead in the race against financial fraud.



ECOWAS MINISTERS MEET:

Representatives of ECOWAS member states at the 2024 Meeting of ECOWAS Ministers of Energy and Hydrocarbons. Nigeria was represented by the Honourable Minister of State for Petroleum Resources (Gas), Rt. Hon. Ekperikpe Ekpo.

FBN Holdings launches ₦149.6bn Rights issue

TITILAYO ALABA

In a significant move for Nigeria’s financial landscape, FBN Holdings Plc (FBNH) has announced a major capital raise through a rights issue aimed at strengthening its flagship subsidiary, First Bank of Nigeria Limited. The company plans to offer nearly 6 billion new shares, valued at approximately ₦149.6 billion, to existing shareholders.

FBNH Chairman Femi Otedola highlighted the importance of this initiative for enhancing shareholders’ returns and restoring First Bank’s position as a leading financial institution in Nigeria. Shareholders can subscribe to one new share for every six held at a price of ₦25.00 per share.

The financial giant had earlier indicated it would raise up to N350 billion through a number of investment options.

“That the Company be and is hereby authorised to undertake a capital raise of up to ₦350,000,000,000.00 (Three Hundred and Fifty Billion Naira). The capital raise transaction shall be implemented by one or more transactions, through the issuance of shares, by way of a public offering, private placement, rights issue in the Nigerian or international capital markets, at price(s) to be determined by way of a book building process or any other valuation method or combination of methods, in such tranches, series or proportions and at such periods or

dates, coupon or interest rates, within such maturity periods and upon such other terms and conditions as may be determined by the Board of Directors subject to obtaining the approvals of the relevant regulatory authorities,” FBN holdings said.

Okonkwo, representing FBN Holdings, emphasized that the rights issue allows shareholders to maintain their relative holdings while equipping First Bank with the necessary capital to seize business opportunities in its operating markets.

Qualifying shareholders are those whose names were in the register of the company as of October 18, 2024, will be able to access participation forms through the company’s website, FirstBank

branches, and designated issuing houses. Additionally, digital applications will be available via the FirstMobile platform, making the process more accessible.

As FBN Holdings embarks on this capital-raising journey, it also encourages shareholders to review the rights circular carefully and seek professional guidance before making any investment decisions. This proactive approach not only aims to strengthen the bank’s financial foundation but also reinforces its commitment to shareholders amid a recovering global economy. With these developments, FBN Holdings is poised to enhance its competitive edge in the financial sector and contribute to Nigeria’s economic growth.

The Polity

• Policy • Legislation • Enforcement

Tinubu's tragic trials of Nigeria's malnourished minors

FAROOQ A. KPEROGI

Nigeria is doddering on the edge of never-before-seen economic desolation, but President Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration's major preoccupation is not to bring ministrations to a badly hurting nation but to prosecute harmless, impoverished, malnourished, and undernourished minors of northern Nigerian origin who, months ago, joined millions of Nigerians to protest for their right to a life without crippling poverty and fear, for which the only reply from the state has been detention and starvation.

On Friday social media platforms were suffused with piteous, nerve-racking videos and photos of four malnourished minors—kids in their early teens whose bones bear witness to weeks in captivity—who collapsed in a courtroom in Abuja. Their fragile, pity-inducing bodies provide evidence of the brutal conditions they've endured in jail. It was an unmitigated scandal, a total embarrassment, a tear-jerking spectacle.

What intolerably rank insanity is this? What halfway sensible government would arrest, imprison, and then publicly try its underage children just because they stood against the unendurable economic tyranny that has pushed millions of Nigerians into incalculable torment?

These children didn't rise up in protest because they were troublemakers. They rose because they were hungry. They saw, in their communities, a growing tide of desperation and despair brought about by a series of misguided neoliberal policies that have squeezed every last drop of dignity from their lives.

The #EndBadGovernance protest was not an act of rebellion for the sake of anarchy, or for the overthrow of the Tinubu administration. It was a scream for survival in a country that has turned a deaf ear to its poorest, youngest, most vulnerable citizens. The children joined the protest, not because they were instigators, but because they are the victims of policies that have crushed them and their parents.

Now, Tinubu is prosecuting these poor children's audacity to feel hunger, their nerve to protest against it, and



X

their courage to ask for a better future.

Yes, young Nigerians, weakened by malnutrition, denuded of hope by unceasingly mounting prices, and drained by the unyielding fear that Nigeria's streets are now safer than its government, are being hauled into court as though they were hard-boiled criminals. There is no parallel for this that I can recall in Nigeria in my lifetime.

How hollow must we be, as a society, to accept that the government's solution to rising dissent and desperation is to prosecute the youth it has left to wither? This is not governance; this is a callous persecution masquerading as law and order.

The logic is Kafkaesque: punish the hungry, hush up the desperate, and maybe, just maybe, the problem will go away. But hunger and despair don't disappear when you throw a child in jail. Poverty doesn't vanish when you suppress a protest. The anger and frustration simmer, unaddressed, until they spill over.

I couldn't hold back tears at the sight of four minors, weak from hunger, fainting as they were called to stand trial. It's a sight that would shame even the most despotic regimes.

Here were young Nigerians, hand-

cuffed by a state that refuses to feed, clothe, or educate them, collapsing before their accusers as if in silent protest, their very bodies speaking louder than any courtroom defense ever could.

Even lawyers and court officials, perhaps briefly awakened from the stupor of compliance, rushed to assist them. But as the immediate shock subsided, what remained was an undeniable truth: Nigeria's youth are being starved, punished, and brought to the brink, not for crimes, but for demanding their right to survive in a country that fails them at every turn.

At the heart of this blot on Nigeria's escutcheon is a government that seems more beholden to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank than to the needs of its own people. President Bola Tinubu's administration has followed the familiar playbook of austerity and subsidy removal, but without the slightest regard for the human cost.

Inflation is climbing, prices are soaring, the naira is plunging, hope is walking away, and the nation is dying. Families cannot afford basic sustenance, the middle class is disappearing, the poor are being crushed beyond the bounds of tolerance, and the nation's

youth, who see no future in the darkening landscape, are told to keep silent or face untoward consequences.

These poor, hapless children are not the problem. The government's own policies are the problem. As I have pointed out repeatedly in multiple columns, the unbending loyalty to IMF austerity measures and "economic reforms" that do nothing but deepen poverty and widen the gulf between the haves and have-nots are the problem.

So why are these policies, and those who enforce them, not on trial instead? Why are the architects of this economic catastrophe not being called to account for the collapse of hope and opportunity?

The prosecution's temporary suspension of the trial of the four minors, after the children slumped in the courtroom, is not mercy; it is an insult. A government that detains minors for protesting unexampled economic adversity has already lost the moral high ground.

The temporary reprieve is nothing more than a bureaucratic sleight of hand, a way to postpone the embarrassment without addressing the real atrocity: the inhumane treatment of minors for daring to stand up against

systemic injustice.

In a twist of poetic irony, the administration's heavy-handed tactics reveal a fearful truth: the voices of Nigeria's youth are a threat to the powerful. It is their courage, their unyielding desire for a better future, that sends tremors through the halls of power.

Instead of seeing in these children a spark of hope, a chance for renewal, the government has chosen to crush that spirit. These young people are Nigeria's conscience, and by silencing them, the state only exposes the depths of its own desperation and degeneration.

Where is the humanity, the leadership, the understanding that a nation's youth are its most precious resource? The Tinubu government must immediately end this untenably appalling charade of prosecuting minors who have the misfortune of being born in desperately poor homes.

It should release these children to their families forthwith. What the kids need is food, opportunity, and security, not prosecution. They are the voices of a generation calling out for empathy, action, and understanding, not retribution. Their cries are not a threat; they are a call to conscience, a summons to a government that has seemingly lost its way in the maze of worthless economic jargon and self-created fiscal constraints.

Let the children heal and live free of the fear that their hunger and hardship will be met with chains. The government must prioritize people over inhuman policies dictated by distant, no-good, vampiric financial institutions in Washington. It must recognize that these policies have consequences, consequences borne not by politicians and their cronies but by millions of Nigerians who struggle daily to survive.

For every child in that courtroom, for every young voice silenced by detention, Nigeria loses a part of its soul. Let this be a warning to those in power: the future is watching, and history will remember which leaders chose compassion over cruelty, justice over vengeance.

Because if a nation's children cannot protest peacefully without fear of reprisal, if their hunger is not a call to action but an excuse for punishment, then the government itself stands on trial—and it is failing spectacularly.

Abia LG Poll: ZLP wins 15 chairmanship seats, as YPP wins 2 seats

TOBORE JEROME

Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) has won 15 of the 17 chairmanship posts in the Abia State local government election held on Saturday, leaving the ruling Labour Party (LP) without a seat.

The Young Progressives Party (YPP) won in the two remaining local government areas of the South-East state – Ugwunagbo and Osisioma Ngwa.

The chairman of the Abia State Independent Electoral Commission (AB-

SIEC), George Chima, made the declaration at the agency's head office in Umuahia, Abia State capital, on Saturday.

While highlighting the significance of the election, the ABSIEC boss said, "We have carried out the duty we were inaugurated on September 5 to undertake. It was not an easy task, but we went out on our way to create awareness about the elections across the state.

"It must be noted that, in recent times, this commission has not conducted an election where over 12 political parties took part. This on its

own is a plus to the commission."

The ABSIEC boss, while describing the poll as free, fair, and credible, said election successfully took place across 17 LGAs.

"I congratulate the winners and the losers too because, in any election, there must be winners and losers," Chima said.

"The most important thing is that Abia has been peaceful and I want the peace to continue. I appreciate the security agencies for their support, and political parties for playing the game according to the rules," he said.



DR. ALEX OTTI, ABIA STATE GOVERNOR



DAN IWEYANWU, ZLP CHAIRMAN

Ondo 2024: The candidates and what analysts say

TOBORE JEROME

The people of Ondo State will be heading to the polls on November 16, 2024 to elect a governor that will pilot the affairs of the state for the next four years.

According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 17 political parties have nominated candidates for the election. The final list of candidates published by INEC on June 14th, 2024 includes incumbent governor, Lucky Aiyedatiwa of the All Progressives Congress (APC), former deputy governor, Agboola Ajayi, of the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), and 15 others.

The commission, through its National Commissioner and Chairman, Information and Voter Education Committee, Sam Olumekun, disclosed that two political parties, the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), conducted fresh primaries to replace their earlier nominated candidates and their running mates by the deadline of 10 June in line with the provision of Section 33 of the Electoral Act 2022.

Following the conclusion of the nomination process, public campaigns by political parties started on Wednesday, 19 June, and will end by the midnight of 14 November.

"As parties commence this critical phase of the election, the Commission once again reminds candidates, agents and their supporters of the provision of the law and the Commission's guidelines governing such activity. For emphasis, parties shall conduct their campaigns with civility and decorum devoid of inciting language, violence, voter inducement and other infractions in accordance with the provisions of Section 92-97 of the Electoral Act 2022," Olumekun said.

As the election date draws close, we take a look at the candidates.

LUCKY AIYEDAITWA (APC)

Lucky Aiyedatiwa, the sitting governor of Ondo State, was born on 12 January 1965. He hails from Obe-NIa, an oil-bearing community in Ilaje Local Government Area of Ondo State.

Aiyedaitwa had his primary education at Saint Peter's UNA (now FAC) Primary School, Obe Nla/Obe Adun, Ondo State, and secondary education at Ikosi High School, Ketu, Lagos. In 1986, he obtained Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in Economics and Government from Lagos State College of Education (now Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education), Ijanikin, Lagos, and later attended University of Ibadan for Advanced Diploma in Business Administration in the year 2001. He became an alumnus of Lagos Business School – Pan Atlantic University, Lekki, Lagos where he obtained Post Graduate Certification in Chief Executive Education (CEP) in Business Management in 2009. In 2013, he obtained a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) from University of Liverpool, United Kingdom.

Aiyedatiwa worked as an Inventory/Store Officer at SCOA Assembly Plant Plc. Apapa, Lagos, between 1982 and 1983. In 1987 he was Assistant Head Teacher at Reliance International Schools, Ijokodo, Ibadan. He



AIYEDATIWA

worked as Marketing Officer at Universal Pharmaceutical Supply Co. Ltd, Ikeja, Lagos, Assistant Investment Analyst at Global Trust Limited, Lagos, and General Merchandise Manager, Biz Mart Nigeria Limited, Lagos.

He is established Blue Wall Group of Companies in 1996, with the following subsidiaries: Blue Wall Nigeria Ltd, a trading company; Blue Wall BDC Nigeria Ltd, a Central Bank of Nigeria-licensed foreign exchange trading company, and Blue Wall Safety Travels and Tours, an IATA-licensed travel agency and logistic company.

He joined active politics in 2011 as a card-carrying member of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) which later merged with other political parties and became APC. He was one of the National Delegates from Ondo State at the APC National Convention at Abuja in 2014. He contested for the federal House of Representative for Ilaje/Ese-Odo Federal Constituency in the 2015 election.

Aiyedatiwa served as the federal commissioner who represented Ondo State on the Board of Niger Delta Development Commission from 2018 to 2019. He was selected as Rotimi Akeredolu's running mate in the 2020 Ondo State gubernatorial election. He became acting governor of Ondo State on 13 December 2023, as Akeredolu left for end-stage leukaemia treatment. Following the death of Akeredolu on 27 December 2023, Aiyedatiwa was sworn in as governor of Ondo State.

AGBOOLA AJAYI (PDP)

Agboola Ajayi, the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), was born on 24 September 1968 to Chief Newton Ajayi and Mrs Rebecca Ogunjinte (née Olubusade). He hails from Kiribo Town of Western Apoi tribe in the Ese Odo LGA of Ondo State. He attended Community High School in Kiribo Town and later moved to Methodist High School in Okitipupa LGA. He then went on to



AJAYI

“Another political equation that pundits are looking at ahead of the November 16th election in Ondo State is which camp the FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, who is serving in an APC administration, will support.

study Law degree at Igbinedion University, Okada in Edo State and graduated with Bachelor of Law (LL.B) at 2nd Class Upper division and subsequently was called to the bar in 2010 after graduating from the Nigerian Law School in Abuja.

Ajayi started his political career under the platform of Social Democratic Party (SDP) and became the chairman of SDP in Old Opoi Ward 1 from 1988 to 1998. He later joined PDP in 1998 and was made the Secretary of PDP in Ilaje/Ese Odo LGA between 1998 and 1999. He was later made the Supervisor for Agriculture for Ese-Odo LGA from 1999 to 2001 and subsequently appointed as Supervisor for Works and Transport for Ese-Odo LGA from 2001 to 2003. He then went on to become the Caretaker Chairman of Ese Odo LGA between 2003 and 2004 before he was finally elected as the chairman of Ese-Odo LGA from

2004 to 2007. He also served as member of the House of Representatives and represented Ilaje/Ese Odo federal constituency under the PDP. During his time in the House, Ajayi served as the chairman House Committee on NDDC from 2007 to 2010.

Ajayi later decamped from PDP to APC and was selected as the running mate to Rotimi Akeredolu (SAN) in the Ondo State Governorship election in November 2016 under the platform of APC. The pair won the election and were sworn in as governor and deputy governor of Ondo State on 24 February 2017. He contested the October 2020 governorship election in Ondo on the platform of the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) and lost to late governor Akeredolu.

AYODELE FESTUS OLORUNFEMI (LP)

A unionist, Dr Ayodele Festus Olorunfemi emerged as the governorship candidate of the Labour Party (LP) in Ondo State on April 26, 2024.

He was formerly General Secretary of the Senior Staff Association of Statutory Corporations and Government Owned Companies (SSASCGOC), an affiliate of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC). He hails from Uro Ajowa and studied at Prowess University, USA.

AKINGBOYE BENSON BAMIDELE (SDP)

Akingboye Bamidele embodies a refreshing departure from traditional politics, focusing instead on genuine service and sustainable development.

At the core of Akingboye's candidacy lies a profound commitment to public service devoid of personal gain. Unlike many politicians who vie for power for self-aggrandizement or financial enrichment, Akingboye's aspirations are firmly rooted in a desire to uplift his state and its people. His vision transcends the allure of office, driven by a genuine dedication to creating a better future for all residents of Ondo State.

Akingboye's platform is a comprehensive strategy for advancing sus-

tainable development goals (SDGs) within the state. Recognizing the urgent need to address pressing issues such as poverty, economic stagnation, and insecurity, he pledges to pioneer initiatives aimed at broadening the state's economic base, reducing the cost of governance, and prioritizing the welfare of the people above all else.

Akingboye's track record as both a politician and a philanthropist speaks volumes about his commitment to public service. Throughout his career, he has consistently demonstrated a steadfast dedication to uplifting the less privileged and empowering communities across Ondo State. His philanthropic endeavours have touched countless lives, earning him widespread respect and admiration from both constituents and colleagues alike.

Other candidates includes Falaiye Abraham Ajibola (A), Akinuli Fred Omolare (AA), Ajayi Adekunle Oluwaseyi (AAC), Akinnodi Ayodeji Emmanuel (ADP), Popoola Olatunji Tunde (APGA), Ogunfeyimi Isaac Kolawole (APM), Fadoju Amos Babatunde (APP), Olugbenga Omogbeni Edema (NNPP), Alli Babatunde Francis (PRP), Akinmurele John Otitolaju (YPP), Adegoke Kehinde Paul (YP), Mimiko Olubansile Abbas (ZLP) and Nejo Adeyemi (ADC) who is a PWD.

WHERE WILL THE PENDULUM SWING?

Stakeholders and political pundits in Ondo State and across the nation have adjudged the upcoming Ondo State governorship election as a two-horse race between the candidate of the ruling APC, Aiyedatiwa, and his main challenger, Agboola Ajayi of the PDP, with the other parties merely completing the list of contenders.

It should be noted that the two main candidates are both former deputies to late former Governor Akeredolu, both had fallen out with the late former governor, and both survived several impeachment attempts.

As the election nears, pundits are studying the body language of the Akeredolu political dynasty and wondering where they will pitch their tent. Though the Akeredolus are members of the ruling APC, they have been at loggerheads with Governor Aiyedaitwa before and after he succeeded late Governor Akeredolu.

Another political equation that pundits are looking at ahead of the November 16th election in Ondo State is which camp the FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, who is serving in an APC administration, will support. Wike is an ally of former governor of Ondo State, Olusegun Mimiko. Both were part of the Integrity Group spearheaded by the G5 governors that gave full support to Bola Tinubu and rejected the PDP candidate, Atiku Abubakar, in the 2023 election. Will Wike support Agboola Ajayi, a member of his party the PDP, who is a political godson of former Governor Mimiko, or will he support Aiyedatiwa, the candidate of the APC and the ruling party that Wike currently serves under. Unlike the September 21 governorship election in Edo State where the FCT Minister, Wike made it very clear that he was not supporting the candidate of his party, Dr Asue Ighodalo, he has been silent regarding the Ondo State election.

Atiku, Obi, others slam FG over detention of minors

PEACE AKPOBOME

● **as AGF takes over case files**

The Federal Government of Nigeria has come under heavy fire following the detention and arraignment of minors who participated in the #EndBadGovernance protests in August.

The nationwide protests, sparked by acute economic hardship, took place between August 1st and 10th and led to the detention of several demonstrators, including children.

On Friday, November 1st, 76 protesters were arraigned in an Abuja court but, disturbingly, four minors among them collapsed in court due to severe hunger and stress accumulated from prolonged detention.

The collapse of the four minors in court caused chaos in the courtroom, prompting Justice Obiora Egwuatu to immediately call for a recess to address the situation. Upon resumption, he ordered the remandment of protesters aged 18 and above at the Kuje Correctional Centre, while minors were sent to the Borstal Home of the Correctional Service. He also granted bail to the protesters the sum of 10 million naira each with two sureties in like sum which must include a civil servant and a parent or sibling of the protesters. The case was adjourned to January 2025.

Reacting to the development, former Vice President and presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 election, Atiku Abubakar, condemned this move by the Federal Government.

"I find it reprehensible that a man who claims to have fought for Nigeria's democracy and had led protests now demonises those who decide to demonstrate against the effects of his harsh and draconian policies," Atiku said in a tweet via his official page on X.

Citing the Child Rights Act, he stressed that children have a right to protest peacefully.

"Children who are the most affected by these policies have every right to protest peacefully, as guaranteed by the Constitution and the Child Rights Act. A nation can be assessed by the way it treats its most vulnerable citizens. It is saddening that even underage children are not spared from the wickedness of T-Pain," he wrote.

Also reacting, the Labour Party's



TINUBU



presidential candidate in the 2023 election, Peter Obi, pointed out that government officials have also participated in protests without facing consequences.

"Curiously, most of the people in government today leveraged this aspect of the Constitution standing as champions of good governance while in opposition," he wrote on X.

The Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance, Senator Musa Sani, also strongly condemned the Federal Government's detention of minors linked to the #EndBadGovernance protests. Musa, who represents Niger East Senatorial District, called on the National Judicial Council (NJC) to investigate the judge's decision and urged the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, to investigate the inhumane treatment and arraignment of the minors.

"I strongly condemn the unjust detention of minors following the #EndBadGovernance protests.... It is deeply troubling that, despite the hardships and challenges these young children have endured, there is a push to have them imprisoned rather than afforded compassion and understanding.

"Such actions are not only inhumane but also unjust. I also condemn the judicial stance advocating for the continued detention of these minors, which is entirely unacceptable and contrary to the principles of justice and fairness," he said in a statement.

Amnesty International Nigeria also frowned at the action. In a press release, the Director, Isa Sanusi, called on the government to release the detainees, stating that peaceful protest is not a crime and the government charging protesters for treasonable felony is a disregard for human rights.

"President Bola Ahmed Tinubu must immediately and unconditionally order the release of all #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protesters still unlawfully detained nationwide solely for exercising their right to peaceful protest. Detaining protesters since August and charging them with bizarre offences, including 'treasonable felony' and 'terrorism-related offences', shows the Nigerian government's utter disregard for the right to freedom of assembly," he said.

Arewa Twitter Connect, a forum representing Hausa interests, also issued a 48-hour ultimatum to the Federal Government to release the detained children, or they would embark in a protest. "We give the Government and the judiciary 48 hours to release these children and provide them with food, shelter and medical care or we shall come out en masse for a peaceful protest," they threatened.

Earlier, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Simon Lough, had said the protesters were arrested in Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Abuja, Gombe, and Sokoto for trying to overthrow President Bola

Tinubu and destabilize Nigeria, an offence which, he said, contravenes Section 96 of the Penal Code and punishable under Section 97 of the code.

The police also told the court that the protesters allegedly destroyed some properties including High Court Complex, NCC Complex, Kano Printing Press, Government House Kano, Kaduna Investment and Promotion Agency and NURTW, thereby committing an offence contrary to Section 410 of the Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Acts CAP, P3, LFN 2004.

The police further alleged in court that the protesters tried to incite mutiny by calling for the removal of the President and saying they wanted the military. He said they were chanting, "Tinubu must go, Soja Musketo". In other words, "Tinubu must go, it is the military we want." This also runs contrary to Section 413 of the Penal Code.

They said the protesters publicly carried Russian flags and displayed it while chanting violent revolutionary songs and calling on the Russian government to overthrow the democratically elected government of Nigeria, which runs contrary to 114 of the Penal Code and punishable under section 111 of the code.

But counsel to the Federal Government, Rimazonite Ezekiel, said the boys standing trial are all adults and not minors.

"These boys we brought to court today, all of them are all adults. Most of them are married men, none of them is a minor. Some of them are university graduates. The small small kids you are seeing here, they came with their parents to come and visit their loved ones," he told newsmen.

Meanwhile, the Attorney General of the Federation, Lateef Fagbemi, has ordered the police to hand over the case file to him, saying he has commenced plans to move the trial date from January 2025 to a closer date.

"It has come to my notice that the police has arraigned those arrested in connection to the #Endbadgovernance violent protests in court for various offenses including treason. There are some issues my office will need to look into regarding the matter to enable me make informed decisions," he said.

Fagbemi pointed out that although it is not within his powers to vary the order of the court to remand the defendants in detention centres and adjourning the case to January, he has however directed the Nigeria Police to transfer the case file to his office and hand over to the Director of Public Prosecution of the Federation (DPPF) on November 2, 2024.

"I have further directed the DPPF to immediately put machinery in motion for consideration of the court to bring the adjournment date forward (an earlier date)," he said.

#EndBadGovernance: SERAP gives Tinubu 48hrs to release hungry, malnourished children

TOBORE JEROME

The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has urged President Bola Tinubu to use his "leadership position and good offices to direct the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice Mr Lateef Fagbemi, SAN to take urgent steps to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all the #EndBadGovernance protesters including the 32 hungry and malnourished children".

SERAP said "these children and other protesters are detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights".

SERAP urged him "to direct Mr Fagbemi and appropriate law enforcement agencies to promptly investigate the circumstances surrounding the grave violations of the human rights of the children and other protesters in detention, and to identify and bring to justice those responsible, and ensure

justice and remedies for the victims".

It also urged him "to direct Mr Fagbemi and appropriate agencies to ensure the immediate access to medical treatment for all the protesters including the 32 hungry malnourished children for their apparently deteriorating health".

In the open letter dated 2 November 2024 and signed by SERAP deputy director Kolawole Oluwadare, the organisation said: "Bringing charges against children and detaining them simply for the peaceful exercise of their human rights is clearly not acting in the 'best interests of the child'.

"The detention of the 32 hungry and malnourished children also infringes their right to education. These children ought to be in school, and not languishing in detention.

"The apparent ill-treatment of the protesters including the 32 hungry and malnourished children have shined a light on the appalling conditions in Nigeria's prisons which continue to put

lives at risk".

The letter, copied to Dr. Matthew Gillett, the Chair-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, read in part: "The continuing arbitrary detention of the protesters creates a climate of fear, discouraging other citizens from freely exercising their human rights, leading to a broader chilling effect.

"We would be grateful if the recommended measures are taken within 48 days of the receipt and/or publication of this letter. If we have not heard from you by then, SERAP shall consider appropriate legal actions to compel your government to comply with our request in the public interest.

"SERAP is concerned that Nigerian authorities are weaponizing the criminal justice system to curtail the rights of the children and other protesters to liberty, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

"We are concerned that the rights of the protesters to life, health, and safety

are being violated in detention. Bringing charges against the protesters and detaining them is neither necessary nor proportionate.

"The conditions in which these children and other protesters are being detained are utterly inadequate and substantially below international standards.

"Children have the right to express their views freely in matters affecting them. Children's ability to engage in political and public affairs depends largely on the extent to which their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

"Your government has the obligations to ensure and uphold the rights of Nigerian children including to life, liberty, education and development, as well as to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth.

"Your government also has the obligation to provide a safe, enabling and empowering environment for young people to promote human rights.

"Your government has the obligations to promptly, thoroughly, impartially, independently, transparently and effectively investigate and appropriately punish those responsible for grave human rights abuses against the protesters in custody and to provide the victims with access to justice and effective remedies.

"Any decision concerning a child must take full account of the child's best interests including by protecting the children from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and ensuring that the detention of a child is used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

"The Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Nigeria is a state party recognizes that children are entitled to a heightened duty of care because of their special status as children, which requires specific measures that take into account their level of development and evolving capacities."

Technology

• ICT • Startups • Telecoms • Devcoms • Blockchain • Cloud

Nigeria positions for AI leadership with N2.8bn Google grant

BILL OKONEDO

Nigeria is taking a major leap towards becoming a leader in Artificial Intelligence (AI) innovation.

Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation & Digital Economy (FMCIDE) has announced a collaboration with Google.org which includes a grant of N2.8 billion to support the development of a skilled AI workforce in Nigeria.

Google.org, founded in October 2005, is the charitable arm of Google, a multinational technology company. The organisation has committed roughly US\$100 million in investments and grants to non-profits annually.

This initiative with Nigeria directly addresses the need for AI expertise in the country. The Google.org grant will be directed towards Data Science

Nigeria, an organisation working with the FMCIDE on AI talent development programs. Here's a breakdown of these programs:

DeepTech Ready Upskilling Programme: This program aims to equip 20,000 young Nigerians with advanced skills in data science and AI, preparing them for careers in this growing field.

Experience AI Programme: This program targets educators, providing them with the tools and resources to introduce AI to 125,000 young people. This initiative aims to inspire the next generation of AI innovators.

Government AI Campus Programme: This program focuses on upskilling policymakers and government officials on AI policymaking. This ensures responsible development and implementation of AI policies in Nigeria.

Building a strong foundation in AI

This collaboration builds upon the groundwork laid by the FMCIDE earlier this year. The Ministry hosted the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS) Workshop, followed by the release of the National AI Strategy. This strategy outlines a plan to leverage AI for economic growth, improved governance, and increased well-being for all Nigerians.

The announcement also highlighted the beneficiaries of the AI Fund, established by the National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (NCAIR) in partnership with Google. Each selected startup will receive N100 million in funding and up to \$3.5 million in Google Cloud Credits to scale their solutions. Additionally, these startups gain access to Google's AI tools, mentorship, and a network of global

innovators.

The ten startups selected represent diverse sectors like healthcare, agriculture, education, and governance. By leveraging AI, these startups can address local challenges and drive sustainable economic growth.

This initiative reflects Google's commitment to fostering innovation in Africa. Matt Brittin, President of Google for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, emphasised their support for African innovators. Brittin highlighted the initiative's potential to unlock the benefits of the digital economy for more Nigerians.

A recent report by Public First estimates that AI could contribute as much as \$15 billion to Nigeria's economy by 2030. By equipping Nigerians with the necessary skills and resources, this collaboration aims to unlock this potential

and secure Nigeria's position as a leader in the digital future.

This announcement builds on Google's previous commitment of N1.2 billion made in 2023 to empower Nigerians through digital skills and

economic growth programs. Together, the FMCIDE and Google are fostering a sustainable AI ecosystem that will drive innovation and positive social and economic impact across Nigeria.

Edo State launches data centre in Benin

● **Governor says stage set for digital competition**

AISOSA AIYAMENKHUE

Edo State Governor, Godwin Obaseki says his reforms embarked upon by his administration in the digital and technology space over the last eight years have revolutionised the state.

Governor Obaseki made the statement on Friday at the launch of the Edo State Digital Policy and Edo Data Centre. He said that was the first data centre owned by a state in Nigeria.

The governor emphasised that his reforms have repositioned Edo as a leading state in digital inclusion in Nigeria, adding that his government was leveraging technology as a catalyst for socio-economic development and inclusive growth.

He said: "I welcome you to the only data center owned by a state in Nigeria. This event is significant because we have started a revolution in Edo State, a digital revolution. We are rounding up with a policy statement that will guide this revolution into the future."

"The population of Edo is scaled towards the youths as they are born in a digital age. The future is digital. It will be difficult to navigate the world today without technology. If you want to develop and grow rapidly, you must begin to think of how to use technology."

"The pace of the advancement of technology in the world today is scary. So, just imagine those who have not started yet; I don't think they can live in the future world. In Edo, we have always been ahead in our history. We have been a knowledgeable people as we interacted at a global level over 500 years ago on our own level."

"To catch up, we had to do something else and different. That was why from the beginning it was clear to us that we had to introduce technology and make sure that we begin to retrain our young ones, the youths, to own this digital world and the confidence in it"

Obaseki added: "We have moved Edo into the digital superhighway and to operate on that superhighway, they must know the rules and must be guided by certain rules and practices. That is what we are doing today and incorporating in this policy document. This will enable everybody to understand the shape of this high way and what they need to do on this highway."

The governor continued: "I had the privilege of working with young people in Edo State and working together, we set up EdoJobs and the Edo Innovate Hub as these have helped our young people and till date, over 50,000 young men and women have benefited from various training and programmes from Edo Innovate. We have been lucky to build a digital ecosystem which has grown rapidly."

"Years ago, as the Chairman of the State's Economy Team, we set up the ICTA but we struggled all through but we kept it alive, and set up the law governing it. The agency is principally responsible for providing technology for the government."

"I am proud today of what we have done in Edo State which is all-encompassing as there is no aspect of government in Edo State that is not digitised or in the process of digitisation. All Government jobs have been digitised, and it is not difficult to operate in Edo as files can't go missing again."

He said: "Technology has made it easy for our children to learn in school through the EdoBEST programme. We have over 400,000 children in our public schools. We have data in all our public schools, teachers, parents and ward of our pupils."

"You can go to any of our primary healthcare centers today without seeing your records, especially if you have registered and with our health insurance. Security, healthcare, agriculture, education and other areas, we have introduced technology."



BRANDCOM AWARDS:

L-R: Public Relations Assistant, Ezeigbo Ugochi Boniface; Social Media Specialist, Titiloye Oluwajuwon; Senior Business Development Manager, Emmanuel Ike; and Creative Designer, Isaac Akpan, all of PalmPay, at the BrandCom Awards 2024 held in Lagos...recently.

NCC troubled as telcos lose staggering sums to vandalism, theft

BERA ESENE

The executive vice chairman of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), Dr. Aminu Maida has lamented the hazards that telecommunications operators in Nigeria currently face by way of frequent fibre cuts, vandalism, and theft of equipment which costs them billions of naira.

Maida made this observation in the light of the recent

declaration of telecom infrastructure as Critical National Information Infrastructure (CNII) by President Bola Tinubu through an Executive Order.

Delivering the keynote address at the launch of the CNII Protection and Resilience Workshop, organised by the National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre (NCCC) under the Office of the National Security Adviser, Maida said Nigeria is now set to address

the challenge.

While noting that the workshop series was to drive the urgent implementation of the CNII Executive Order as a major step towards securing Nigeria's communications and digital infrastructure, the NCC boss said: "The telecom industry faces significant challenges, including frequent fibre cuts, vandalism, and theft, which cost operators billions of naira in revenue and billions of naira in repair expenses."

"Additionally, restricted access to telecom facilities by property owners and government entities hampers network expansion efforts, limiting connectivity and impacting service quality."

Over the years, stakeholders in the Nigerian ICT sector have been calling on the government to designate telecom infrastructure as a critical national asset, to address the persistent attacks on the infrastructure across the country.

Concerns raised as FG invests \$623m in surveillance tech

JEREMIAH OMUOMWAN AND JESSICA OSEBHOR

Spaces for Change (S4C), a civil society organisation, says in a new report that Nigeria has invested \$40 million in intercept technology and \$583 million in public surveillance systems.

These technologies allow legally sanctioned official access to private communications, such as telephone calls and e-mail messages, in a bid to enhance national security, prevent crime and aid criminal investigations.

Executive director of S4C, Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri, says that "The Nigerian government has allocated approximately

\$40m for intercept technologies and an estimated \$583m on public surveillance projects with Chinese tech firms."

Ibezim-Ohaeri, spoke at the West Africa Civil Society Week held in Abuja with the theme, "Leveraging Technology for Civic Engagement and Social Change in West Africa"

At the event held in collaboration with Civic Space Resource Hub, West Africa Civil Society Institute and the Ford Foundation, Ibezim-Ohaeri stated that this expenditure prioritised security over essential public services like education and health-care, raising questions about the government's commitment to human rights.

With lawful interception (LI), law enforcement authorities, in response to a warrant from a judge, can perform interception, simply by applying a 'tap' on the telephone line of the target, making it possible for security agencies in Nigeria to listen to terrorist and criminal cell phone calls and gather communications intelligence on their dark activities.

Ibezim-Ohaeri, however, said her organization's report emphasised the historical context of surveillance in Nigeria, linking colonial practices to modern state surveillance tactics.

She noted, "Colonial authorities established a framework for surveillance that persists today,

where security agencies continue to repress dissent and monitor civic actors."

Key findings from the report indicated that the military regime significantly intensified state surveillance, enacting laws that curtailed press freedoms and facilitated the harassment of journalists and political activists.

"Just as the U.S. expanded surveillance post-9/11, Nigeria mirrored this response after the 2011 UN building bombing," she remarked, referring to legislation that broadened surveillance powers under the guise of national security.

The report outlined how civic actors and opposition politicians

are often the primary targets of these surveillance initiatives.

"Evidence shows that state governors have acquired surveillance technologies to monitor political rivals, demonstrating the pervasive nature of these tactics," Ibezim-Ohaeri explained.

Furthermore, the report highlighted that most surveillance technologies used in Nigeria are imported from countries like Israel, China, and the United States, emphasising the risks posed by dual-use technologies that can be repurposed for oppressive measures.

"The dual-use nature of these technologies significantly contributes to their unchecked proliferation, often leading to abuses by both state and non-state

actors," she stated.

Despite existing legal frameworks, the report criticised the inadequacy of regulatory controls over surveillance technologies.

"While laws exist to govern surveillance, their enforcement is weak, creating a fertile ground for abuse and misuse," Ibezim-Ohaeri cautioned.

In light of these findings, the report called for urgent reforms, including improved regulatory oversight and transparency in the procurement processes for surveillance technologies.

"We need a commitment to human rights that begins at the production stage, ensuring that surveillance technologies do not infringe on civil liberties," she said.

IHS donates solar-powered boreholes to Borno flood victims

JENNIFER ODUWARE

IHS Nigeria, part of the IHS Holding Limited (NYSE: IHS) ("IHS Towers") operators and developers of shared communications infrastructure, has announced the donation of four solar-powered boreholes to support victims of recent floods in Maiduguri, Borno State.

The donation, which will be delivered through the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) emergency flood response, will help address the most urgent needs of flood-affected populations in Borno State, especially those displaced following flooding in Maiduguri

Metropolitan Council, Jere and Konduga LGAs.

The response by IHS Nigeria and UNICEF will help mitigate the impact of the flood and the risk of waterborne diseases to nearly 20,000 people, including vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and young mothers, children, and patients visiting health centers.

The four solar-powered boreholes donated by IHS Nigeria will be constructed in displaced peoples' settlements and other temporary displacement sites.

This will include in densely populated areas without access to a safe water source, schools, to help facilitate the early re-

turn of children to classes, and at health centers, which are also used as Outpatient Therapeutic Program sites and provide nutrition services and counselling for pregnant women, young mothers, and malnourished children.

Mohamad Darwish, CEO, IHS Nigeria, said, "We empathise with the government and people of Borno State and extend our sympathies to those who lost loved ones and properties in the flood.

"We are aware that as people begin to return to their homes and communities with flood waters receding, they continue to face major risk factors, including damaged and contaminated water sources.

"A key priority for us, which informed our donation

of these boreholes, is to help prevent or limit outbreaks of communicable diseases such as cholera, while improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services for affected populations.

This donation is an extension of our partnership with UNICEF, which since 2021 has supported the provision of WASH facilities to over 6,000 beneficiaries and enabled the delivery of over one million preventive and curative treatments for tropical diseases related to WASH."

Cristian Munduate, UNICEF Representative in Nigeria, said, "UNICEF is very grateful to IHS Nigeria for their generous donation of solar-powered boreholes, which comes at a critical time for communities affected by recent floods in Borno State."

FintechNGR rolls out dynamic growth plan on "PIE" agenda

BERA ESENE

The Fintech Association of Nigeria (FintechNGR) is re-strategising for growth under its new President, Dr. Stanley Jacob.

Dr. Jacob, alongside Vice President Dr. Jameelah Sheriff-Aiyedun,

The association aims to foster a thriving, innovative, and inclusive fintech ecosystem for the country, it says.

Dr. Jacob says his administration is committed to continuing on the trail of success set by previous leaders like Dr. Segun Aina, the first President, and Mr. Ade Bajomo, his pre-

decessor. He said his vision for the association, centers on the "PIE" agenda of Participation, Innovation, and Expansion.

He said increased engagement from all stakeholders is a key ingredient to attaining the goals and that this will further be achieved through specialised communities of practice, member-driven initiatives, and fostering global and Pan-African collaboration.

He further stated that the association is embracing hyper-digitisation and that a soon-to-launch online community and membership portal promise a vibrant online space for interaction and collaboration.

ROSEMARY
That I, MISS ROSEMARY OMATSULI and HARUNA-OBIOHA ROSEMARY is one and the same person. Henceforth, now wish to be known and addressed as HARUNA-OBIOHA ROSEMARY. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

OSAMUYIMEN
I, formerly known and addressed as OBAZEE MARVELLOUS OSAMUYIMEN, now wish to be known and addressed as ENABULELE MARVELLOUS OSAMUYIMEN. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

GRACE
I, formerly known and addressed as NWOZOR GRACE, now wish to be known and addressed as OVBIAGELE EBUN GRACE. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

CHIZURUM
I, formerly known and addressed as IBEM CHIZURUM IFEOMA, now wish to be known and addressed as MRS. OGBOGU CHIZURUM IFEOMA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

AISOSA
I, formerly known and addressed as ASOMBA FAVOUR AMARACHI, now wish to be known and addressed as OGBEIDE ANGEL AISOSA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

GODWIN
I, formerly known and addressed as ASOMBA ONYINYEGBUKWU GODWIN, now wish to be known and addressed as OGBEIDE EFOSA GODWIN. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

TRACY
I, formerly known and addressed as MISS EKHTOR TRACY, now wish to be known and addressed as MRS. ENYICHUKWU TRACY. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

AIGBOKHIODE
That my first name was wrongly captured on my BVN as AGBOKHADE instead of AIGBOKHIODE, that my full and correct name AIGBOKHIODE SUNDAY JEBBA, that JEBBA is my (surname), AIGBOKHIODE is my (first name) while SUNDAY is my (middle name). Henceforth now wish to be known and addressed as AIGBOKHIODE SUNDAY JEBBA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

JOHNSON
I, formerly known and addressed as JOHNSON OMON-OMON, now wish to be known and addressed as JOHNSON SOLOMON OMON. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

LINDA
I, formerly known and addressed as MISS OMOIGBERALE LINDA, now wish to be known and addressed as MRS. OMOIFOH LINDA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

OWA
I, formerly known and addressed as MISS EDIGIN OWA JOY, now wish to be known and addressed as MRS. OKOROMI JOY OWA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

ILOARIA
I, formerly known and addressed as EMENEDO OGHAE, now wish to be known and addressed as SOLOMON ILOARIA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

ABUGEWA
I, formerly known and addressed as ABIGAIL MOYOWA ABUGEWA, now wish to be known and addressed as ABUGEWA OLUWAMOYOWA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

OMOROGBE
I, formerly known and addressed as OMOROGBE IYORE EMMANUEL, now wish to be known and addressed as OMOROGBE KEVEN. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

OIKHALA
That, OIKHALA EKPEN JOSEPHINE and OIKHALA HEPHZIBAH JOSEPHINE EKPEN is one and same person. I now wish to be known and addressed as OIKHALA EKPEN JOSEPHINE. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

ENOMA
I, formerly known and addressed as OMOIHO ENOMA BLESSING, now wish to be known and addressed as CHUKWUEMEKA ENOMA BLESSING. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

ESTHER
I, formerly known and addressed as AIGBIREMOLEN ESTHER, now wish to be known and addressed as EGBELE ESTHER. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

IKPONMWOSA
That IKPONMWOSA IYORE EUNICE and UGIAGBE JOY is one and the same person. Henceforth now wish to be known and addressed as IKPONMWOSA IYORE. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

ISIOMA
I, formerly known and addressed as MISS ISIOMA BEAUTY AJAYI, now wish to be known and addressed as MRS. ISIOMA BEAUTY OSADIAYE. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

MURTALA
I, formerly known and addressed as MURTALA MOHAMMED MAIMAL, now wish to be known and addressed as MUHAMMED MURTALA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

UFUMWEN
That I, UFUMWEN ENOKHUOMWAN JACKSON, UFUMWEN ENOKHUOMWAN J. UFUMWEN JACKSON and UFUMWEN E. JACKSON is one and the same person. Henceforth now wish to be known and addressed as UFUMWEN ENOKHUOMWAN JACKSON. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

EGUASA
I, formerly known and addressed as ESTHER BENJAMIN, now wish to be known and addressed as EGUASA CAROLINE. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

IYEKOWA
That my name was wrongly captured as IYEKOWA FIRDAY, that IYEKOWA OSAIGBOVO is my (surname) while FIRDAY is my (first name). Henceforth now wish to be known and addressed as IYEKOWA OSAIGBOVO FIRDAY. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

IYEKOWA
That my name was wrongly captured as IYEKOWA PAULINA IDAKA, that IYEKOWA OSAIGBOVO is my (first name) while PAULINA is my (first name). Henceforth now wish to be known and addressed as IYEKOWA OSAIGBOVO PAULINA. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

MISSING DEED OF TRANSFER LAND DOCUMENTS



That I, MRS. OSAGIEDE OGBEWKON RUKA WARNER is the rightful owner of a missing deed of transfer land documents of a parcel of land measuring 50ft by 100ft (Fifty Feet by One Hundred Feet) situate at Useh Quarters, Off Upper Siluko Road, Egor Local Government Area, Edo State of Nigeria. That the said Deed of Transfer Land Documents was Discovered Missing on the 2nd day of December, 1995 in Benin City, Edo State. That all effort made to trace the said missing deed of transfer land document proved Abortive. Concerned authorities should please take note.

ISOKEN
I, formerly known and addressed as MRS. ISOKPAN ISOKEN VERONICA, but due to dissolution of marriage by High Court of Justice Edo State of Nigeria in the Abudu Judicial Division HOLDEN at Benin City on the 25th of November 2022. Wish Revert to my maiden name, ADUN ISOKEN VERONICA.

ITOHAN
I, formerly known and addressed as EKI MERCY ITOHAN, now wish to be addressed as MRS. FOFANA MERCY ITOHAN. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

CHUKWUKERE
That my middle name was wrongly captured on my BVN as CHUKS instead of CHUKWUKERE that PETER is my (first name), CHUKWUKERE is my (middle name) while OBI is my (surname). Henceforth now wish to be known and addressed as PETER CHUKWUKERE OBI. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

OYADAN
I, formerly known and addressed as MISS OYADAN JULIET EBELOSELE, now wish to be known and addressed as MRS. OYADAN JULIET EBELOSELE ONORIMUO. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

 The Nigerian Observer ...That the people may know					<h1 style="text-align: center;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES</h1> <h2 style="text-align: center;">(PRINT)</h2>														
SIZES	COLOUR		BLACK AND WHITE		BLACK AND WHITE		MULTI NATIONALS												
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FULL PAGE	517,344	556,145	369,500	397,213	325,150	349,536	665,156	715,043	443,440	476,698									
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PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE																		
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Education

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NASU, SSANU suspend strike for one month: What next?

NGOZI OKECHUKWU & ESTHER IJEH

The Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU) and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) have announced suspension of the ongoing nationwide indefinite strike over the four months withheld salaries.

The SSANU and the NASU began an indefinite strike on October 28, protesting non-payment of salaries for over four months. This strike has disrupted school activities, forcing students to stay at home.

The salary dispute between the Federal Government and university non-teaching unions

has intensified with the unions insisting on not returning to work until their demands are met. Although the Federal Government has approved payment of 50 percent of the four months' salaries, the strike continues.

During a meeting held last Thursday in Abuja with the unions, the chairman of the Joint Action Committee (JAC), Comrade Hassan Makolo, made it known that the leadership of the unions would call off the strike when members confirmed they had received payments alerts. Makolo emphasized that the unions are not strike-happy but are driven to action by unresolved issues.

Students are bearing the brunt of the strike, with essential services like water and electricity unavaila-

ble in school hostels. A University of Benin student noted that the backup generators are also inactive due to the strike and there is lack of water due to this development, impacting negatively on their learning and academics.

In a phone interview with a member of the non-teaching staff, Mr. Nelson, when asked if they ever intend to call off the strike if their demands are not met sooner?

He said the unions do not intend to back down until their demands are met, stating that they are not happy their salaries have not been paid and their agreement with the government to call off the strike depends on the government meeting their demands.

Asked if the Federal Government happens to come in between

the unions in the future what would be their stance? He answered, "The Union is well known but if the government comes in between the unions, we don't really care. Anyone that tries to break away is at their own expense, but until the government sees to our demands we will not back down."

The former Minister of State Education, Dr. Yusuf Sununu, while speaking at the meeting held last Thursday, pleaded with the unions that the Federal Government was looking into the matter having reached an advancement stage in their discussions.

Meanwhile, 98 percent of the unions' members have complied with the strike, refusing to back down until the government meets their demands.



OGEAH

Ututama's intellectual input to governance was phenomenal —Ogeah

ESTHER OGBODO

Professor Amos Agbe Ututama, former Deputy Governor of Delta State, has been described as a university don whose sojourn into government brought phenomenal change to the quality of legislation in states. He was deputy to Dr. Emmanuel Eweta Uduaghan who was Governor from 2007 to 2015.

Ogbueshi Chike Ogeah stated this in his tribute to Ututama, saying, "When he left University of Lagos to become Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice in Delta State, he brought his vast expertise as a law teacher to bear in the quality of bills passed into law by the House of Assembly. That Delta State and other Niger Delta states are today getting a measure of their due in oil revenues through derivation was largely due to his drive for equity for oil producing states."

"He was able to beat all the obstacles, administrative and legal, to secure victory for oil producing states", Ogeah who was a Commissioner for Infor-

mation during Ututama's second term as deputy governor stated.

"I was privileged to be one of his students at University of Lagos where he taught me land law. It was a course that was reputed to be tough, but Prof. Ututama through his unique mentorship and fatherly approach made us scale through without undue hassles. And when I was Commissioner under him, he extended the same fatherly disposition he had towards me as his student."

Extolling the late lecturer, the former Information Commissioner said the level of professionalism and integrity he brought to governance is in stark contrast to the narrative surrounding academics involved in the organisation of elections.

"Prof. Ututama impacted a legacy of service, honour and integrity on us that had the privilege of being his students. He was a very loyal Deputy to his Principal and epitomised simplicity and conscience in governance. May God comfort his family", Ogeah said.



The protesters

Revolutionizing education the Montessori way

NGOZI OKECHUKWU

For over the century, the Montessori system of teaching has been transforming the way children learn. Developed by a French physician and educator, Maria Montessori, in 1907, it is a unique system of teaching that focuses on self-directed learning instead of the traditional teacher teaching method, empowering the children to take ownership of their educational journey.

Maria Montessori, Italy's first female doctor, pioneered this groundbreaking method by opening her school, Casa dei Bambini, a children learning house in Rome on January 6, 1907 to support un-

derprivileged children with learning difficulties. Maria encouraged the children to take ownership of their learning, bringing about personalised learning, she helped the children learn based on their development strengths and abilities. Her work led to her publication "Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini," in 1909 gaining international recognition.

WHY IS MONTESSORI UNIQUE?

The Montessori method of teaching differs significantly from the traditional teaching method where the teacher has to stand in front of the class and give instructions to the children. It is a unique system because it

focuses on the child's individual learning ability. The Montessori teacher is trained to observe the children and guide them while they learn on their own, like Maria quotes, "The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say "The children are now working as if I did not exist".

The child becomes independent of themselves in learning. The Montessori method will give the child the freedom of choice to learn either with their peers or on their own, providing practical materials for them to work with. This helps the child to develop social skills and be capable of him/her enhancing also critical thinking, cognitive and social skills needed in this 21st Century.

The Montessori teacher uses practical materials and teaching aids to help make learning better. She/he observes each child's learning ability and helps to put them through. It emphasizes practical life skills teaching the child everyday activities like cooking, cleaning, caring for themselves and their environment.

Montessori also encourages mixed-age learning, the children are grouped into 0-3 years old for infant-toddlers, 3-6 years old for the nursery, 6-12 years old for the elementary, and 12-18 years old for secondary, fostering leadership skills and cooperation. Self correction and assessment is also achieved as they carry out their work inde-

pendently, they learn to correct and help themselves through the guidance of the teacher.

The Montessori classroom is beautifully designed to meet the child's needs and is equipped with practical materials like colouring, plants, movable letters and other teaching aids to help give the child a good learning environment. It is like an open field where the child learns and explores satisfying their curiosity. Research indicates that 75 percent of Montessori students report higher academic achievements according to the Montessori Research Project.

In view of this, some Montessori teachers expressed their opinions on the importance of Mon-

tessori learning. A teacher from Diamond Montessori Academy in Benin City, Miss Favour Okechukwu, notes, "Montessori helps the children capture what they are learning. For example, when a Montessori teacher wants to teach a topic on soil or colouring, she has to show the different soils to the child or use colourful things like balloons to show them the colours, and it will help the child remember easily what they taught."

Another teacher, Mrs Favour Isah, who had taught in two different Montessori schools - UPSS and Diamond Montessori School, says, "The method helps to make learning fun for the child using tools and materials that engage the five senses.

Sports

● Football ● Athletics ● Golf ● Basketball ● Tennis ● Boxing

AFCON 2025 qualifiers: Nigerians in Libya to face mass arrests, fines amid CAF ruling fallout

FOLUSEWA AKINOLA AND IKPONMWOSA ODIGIE

Reports from Libya indicate a wave of arrests and \$500 fines imposed on Nigerian nationals, following a contentious ruling by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) that awarded Nigeria's Super Eagles three points and three goals.

The decision, made after Nigeria's men's team was detained

for over 20 hours at Al-Abraq Airport, was issued by CAF's disciplinary committee after a complaint from the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF).

Libyan Football Federation President Nasser Al-Suwai'I has decried the CAF decision as "unjust and malicious," alleging undue influence from the NFF. The ruling has fueled resentment in Libya, where influential media sources, in-

cluding Libya News Today, have called for strict measures against Nigerians residing in Libya, especially those lacking official documentation.

A post from Libya News Today, which has a substantial social media following, urged the Libyan government to fine undocumented Nigerian workers \$500 each and ensure deportation for those who fail to pay.

"All Libyan TV channels are

urging the government to arrest the Nigerian workers who are working here in Libya without legal papers. They have to pay \$500 plus taxes," read the post, further inciting tension.

A Libyan TV presenter has echoed these sentiments, labeling the earnings of Nigerians working without paying taxes as "haram," or sinful, and called for enforcing strict penalties and deportations. The popular

Libyan news site Libya INF TV also reported demands for immediate government action, suggesting that those who resist deportation face no mercy.

Adenaike Emmanuel, a Nigerian resident in Tripoli, reported to Punch Newspaper that the arrests began shortly after the CAF announcement on Saturday.

"They have already started. Libyans are expressing their discontent and believe they are retaliating," he said. Emmanuel mentioned that arrests occurred in multiple areas, including Tripoli, on both Sun-

day morning and afternoon. He believes it's their way of getting revenge," he said.

Omoregie, who confirmed the story said, "The arrests started on Sunday night in some areas in Tedora. They are arresting innocent people. They don't even care whether you have passports or residence permits. They just don't care, which doesn't happen in other countries."

The situation has left Nigerians in Libya in an anxious state as they brace for intensified scrutiny, arrests, and financial penalties amid rising anti-Nigerian sentiments.

Edo People Forum 2020: Edokpolo, Idia College win 2024 Edo Secondary Schools Football Tournament Titles



OLATOMIWA OYEDELE AND FOLUSEWA SIMEON

The 3rd edition of the Edo State Annual Secondary Schools Football Tournament organized by the Edo People Forum 2020, climaxed with a thrilling final on Friday at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in Benin City as Edokpolo Grammar School grabbed the title in the boys' category while Idia College secured top spot in the girls' division.

The tournament aimed at identifying and nurturing grassroots football talents across the three Senatorial Districts in Edo State.

The grand finale drew an enthusiastic crowd as Edokpolo Grammar School defeated St. David's College, Evboneka, in a hard-fought match ending 3-2. PraiseGod Monday, Ubebe Miracle, and Iboi Godspower each scored for Edokpolo, while St. David's player Ewean Osaze scored twice in the second half, nearly pushing the game into extra time. Despite the valiant comeback efforts, Edokpolo held their ground to claim the championship.

In the girls' final, Idia College, Benin City, dominated St. Angela's Girls Grammar School of Jattu with a 3-0 victory, marking their third consecutive tournament win.

Eye Secondary School took third place in the girls' category, while Oghe Community Sec-

ondary School from Etsako East Local Government Area finished third in the boys' division. The champions in the boys' and girls' categories were awarded cash prizes of one million Naira each, while the second and third-place teams received N500,000 and N300,000 respectively, along with certificates of participation, medals, and trophies.

The tournament also recognised individual excellence,

awarding titles like Most Valuable Player, Highest Goal Scorer, and Best Goalkeeper.

The tournament organized to support Edo youths, featured 160 students from across eight secondary schools in the state who competed over six days. The organizers ensured that all participants were accommodated in one of Benin City's best hotels and provided with three meals daily.

The final also featured Ekhatator Vanessa Aisosa, the youngest female referee in Nigeria, who at 12 years old officiated her first official match in Edo State.

She felt happy to be the youngest female referee in Nigeria, noting that she started her referee career earlier this year and hopes to push her career to the European level.

A former Governor of Edo State, His Excellency Chief Lucky Nosakhare Igbinedion who presented the trophy to the winners of the Edo State Secondary Schools Football Competition for the male team, Edokpolo Grammar School in an interview with The Nigerian Observer reporters said, "It is highly encouraging and we must commend the promoters and those that have supported through sponsorship, we can see how this competition has grown from last year.



EGUAVOEN

Joe Marler retires from international rugby

FOLUSEWA AKINOLA

England prop, Joe Marler's career comes to an end as he announces his retirement.

Marler expressed his will to leave due to the fact that he had to focus on his family apart from the fact that he wasn't as good as he used to be again.

On his Twitter (X) account, he wrote, "I kept waiting for it to pop and me to suddenly go back to being a gobby, overweight 16-year-old again. But you know when it's time. I can't do what I used to do as well as I once could. I can't keep talking about my family being my priority unless they actually are. I want to keep it untarnished, all these memories of my career, both good and bad. I don't

want to leave my house with my kids crying. I'm ready to make the change".

He appreciated his teammates who had been with him all through his time in the England team.

Marler has retired from international rugby before, in 2018, only to reverse his decision in time for the 2019 World Cup but at 34.

England head coach, Steve Borthwick praised Marler upon his retirement by saying: "Joe has been an outstanding servant to English rugby – a tough, uncompromising competitor on the field, and a genuine, one-of-a-kind personality off it," England coach said.

Marler will continue playing for Harlequins until the end of the season.

Lookman shines as Atalanta crush Serie A Leaders Napoli 3-0 in Conte's nightmare home defeat

IKPONMWOSA ODIGIE

Ademola Lookman delivered a brilliant performance, helping Atalanta dismantle Serie A leaders Napoli with a commanding 3-0 win on Sunday, marking a career low for Napoli's manager, Antonio Conte, Soccer.net.ng reports.

The Nigerian winger set the tone early, scoring two expertly-taken goals in the first half. Lookman's opener silenced the crowd at Stadio Diego Armando Maradona as he capitalized on a poor clearance from Napoli's Matias Olivera. Charles De Ketelaere's clever flick found Lookman, who volleyed the ball in from a tight angle,

ending Napoli's streak of three consecutive clean sheets.

Lookman doubled Atalanta's lead shortly after, with a stunning solo effort that saw him glide past Giovanni Di Lorenzo and fire a powerful shot past Napoli goalkeeper Alex Meret.

Despite Napoli's attempts to claw back in the second half — including a powerful strike from Khvicha Kvaratskhelia — Atalanta's defense held strong. Mateo Retegui added the finishing touch in stoppage time, converting a cross from Matteo Ruggeri with a low volley to seal Atalanta's victory.

Conte's loss to Atalanta was especially painful, as Opta noted it was only the second time in his Serie A career he has lost at home by a three-goal margin, the previous occasion being a 5-2 defeat to Juventus in 2009.



LOOKMAN



JOE MARLER

MLS: Atlanta's late show shocks Messi, Inter Miami in Playoffs

OKOEGUALE ADOLOR

Atlanta United clinched a thrilling 2-1 playoff win over Inter Miami on Saturday, dealing a blow to Lionel Messi's hopes of leading the Florida team to MLS Cup success.

Portuguese winger Xande Silva scored a spectacular stoppage-time winner for Atlanta in the fourth minute of added time, thrilling the 68,455 fans at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. The victory leveled the best-of-three playoff series at 1-1 and forced a decisive game three at Inter Miami next Saturday.

Inter Miami, the top seed and 2-1 victors in game one

the previous week, appeared on course for a series win after Paraguay international David Martinez opened the scoring in the 40th minute. The goal came following a costly error by former U.S. goalkeeper Brad Guzan, who mishandled a routine clearance, allowing Federico Redondo to intercept and pass to Martinez for an easy finish into an open goal.

In response, Atlanta mounted an intense second-half push to keep their season alive, equalizing in the 58th minute with a powerful header from Derrick Williams.

The fast-paced game saw opportunities for both sides,



and Georgia international Saba Lobjanidze nearly gave Atlanta the lead in the 89th minute, only to see Miami goalkeeper Drake Callender tip his shot onto the post.

With the match seemingly

destined for a penalty shoot-out, Atlanta launched one final assault on Miami's defense. Aleksey Miranchuk found Silva, who made no mistake and fired a decisive strike into the top corner.

'My mission is to make Sports Viable in Nigeria', says NSC chair

CHIDINMA KALU

Shehu Dikko, the newly appointed Chairman of the National Sports Commission (NSC), has declared his commitment to building a sustainable sports economy in Nigeria, a journey he says has now officially begun.

This statement came as former Sports Minister John Enoh formally handed over the reins of the country's sports administration to Dikko in a ceremony held in Abuja.

Dikko, reflecting on his history with the NSC, noted how significant it felt to return to a project he helped initiate over a decade ago.

He emphasized that the goal of the Tinubu administration is to fully unlock the potential of Nigeria's sports sector.

Dikko outlined a shift in



DIKKO

focus from mere participation and medals to a robust sports development framework.

He believes Nigeria must adopt a "Production" model, focusing on sustainable sports development.

He presented a three-pillar strategy for Nigeria's sports sector, beginning with a focus

on infrastructure.

"The other pillar is investing in purposeful world-class infrastructures that will provide an enabling environment for Growth. These infrastructures must be deliberate with maintenance culture and span from world-class infrastructure for

professional sports to community infrastructure to drive grassroots sports and mass participation across the country," he said.

According to him, President Tinubu's vision is that sports should contribute to the national GDP and generate employment.

He stated that his administration will focus on treating sports as a "National Asset" entitled to "special privileges, regulations, and concessions to drive growth and development."

He commended President Tinubu's decision to reestablish the NSC, saying, "It's a visionary decision for Mr. President to approve the return of the National Sports Commission to drive this process and objectives in line with the best international practices and standards devoid of any bureaucratic bottlenecks but absolute professionalism."

Basketball: Rivers Hoopers claim Atlantic Conference Title in dramatic finish over Hoops and Read

CHIDINMA KALU

Defending champions Rivers Hoopers clinched the Atlantic Conference title with a nail-biting 80-78 victory over Hoops and Read on Saturday in Benin, wrapping up the conference unbeaten.

Four Hoopers players scored in double figures: Johnson Anaiye led with 13 points, Michael Okiki followed with 12, while Patrick Abah and Ifeanyi Koko chipped in 10 points each. Abah and Koko were both strong from long range, each hitting two of their three-point attempts (2/3).

Anaiye was reliable at the free-throw line, making 8 of 12 attempts, while team captain Victor Koko and vice-captain Buchi Nwaiwu each pulled down six rebounds, adding defensive strength on the boards.

The Hoopers established an early lead, going up 20-10 with two minutes left in the first quarter, but Hoops and Read closed the gap with a 7-0 run, finishing the period just two points behind.

Overall, Rivers Hoopers shot 7-of-27 from three-point range and converted 21-of-27 from the foul line. They also out-rebounded their opponents 31-28, gaining the edge on the glass.

Former Hoopers players Michael Oriakhi and Bolaji Emilagba were standout performers for Hoops and Read, combining

for 28 points and driving a 25-20 fourth-quarter rally. Emilagba hit a critical three-pointer with 18 seconds left, narrowing the score to 79-78.

After a timeout by the Hoopers' head coach Ogoh Odaudu, Okiki was fouled and made one of his two free throws, pushing the Hoopers' lead to 80-78.

Koko then secured a key rebound in the final seconds, allowing Rivers Hoopers to hold onto their seventh consecutive win in the Atlantic Conference.

The team now returns to Port Harcourt to prepare for the Final Eight tournament, scheduled for November 13-19 at a yet-to-be-determined venue.

Newcastle edge Arsenal 1-0, delivering a setback in Gunners' title pursuit

CHIDINMA KALU

Newcastle United dealt Arsenal a blow in the Premier League title race with a narrow 1-0 win at

St. James' Park, thanks to an early header from Alexander Isak.

This marked Newcastle's first victory in six league matches, bringing them up to

eighth in the standings with 15 points, while Arsenal held onto third place with 18 points, awaiting results from title contenders Manchester City and Liverpool.

The game's only goal came in the 12th minute when Anthony Gordon, controlling the ball on the right wing, delivered a precise cross that found Isak between Arsenal defenders Gabriel and William Saliba. The Swedish forward rose high to send a powerful header past Arsenal's goalkeeper David Raya, securing his third league goal of the season.



Frank Warren confirms Dubois won't be fighting Anthony Joshua

FOLUSEWA AKINOLA

72-year-old promoter, Frank Warren has ruled out any possibility of Daniel Dubois fighting Anthony Joshua in his next match, hinting that there have been talks with other people regarding his next match so

In an interview with Box Nation Warren said, "I don't see that happening next. So we're looking at a couple of things at the moment so we'll make a decision. I was hoping we could've done it fairly and quickly but we won't. I was hoping to get it done last then this week then this week, so sometime next week we are going to be in a position where we can close on something and we are talking to a few other guys".

He believes Joshua is "injured" as he feels "it's taken a while" and the fight won't happen. He backs Dubois by saying "We're in the Daniel Dubois business, he's the

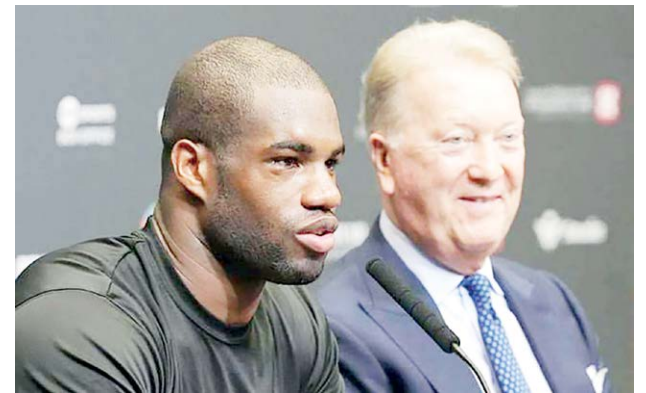
champion, and he's the guy who matters to me".

He also ruled out a fight with Fabio Wardley who made headlines with a fabulous first-round knockout victory against Frazer Clarke.

He believes Fabio is a "fighting man" which could be built into something "mega".

In his statement, "I don't see that (Fabio Wardley fight) happening next; I can't see it being next. For me, that fight could be built into something mega; there is no doubt about that."

Dubois' next fight is expected to be on the 22nd of February. With Anthony Joshua and Fabio Wardley ruled out for a face-off against the heavyweight champion, Joseph Parker and Zhilei Zhang have emerged as potential opponents for Dubois' second title defence. But Warren has hinted they are not going to be "rushed into anything" and they also want to make a choice that would suit everyone most especially Daniel Dubois.



FRANK WARREN WITH MANAGER

Tennis: World No.1 Sinner withdraws from Paris Masters due to virus

OKOEGUALE ADOLOR

World No. 1 Jannik Sinner has withdrawn from the Paris Masters indoor tournament due to an "intestinal virus," tournament organizers announced.

Sinner, who secured the year-end top ranking in mid-October for the first time in his career at age 23, will be replaced in the draw by French qualifier Arthur Cazaux. Cazaux is set to face either fellow Frenchman Corentin Moutet or American Ben Shelton in the second round on Tuesday.

Organizers noted that Sinner contracted the intestinal virus before arriving in Paris.

The season's main goal for Sin-

ner remains the ATP Finals in Turin, where the year's top eight players will compete from November 10-17. Following this, he is expected to participate in the Davis Cup Finals in Malaga, Spain, where Italy is the defending champion.

Sinner has enjoyed a remarkable 2024 season, claiming his first two Grand Slam titles at the Australian Open and the US Open. Altogether, he has won seven tournaments this season, including three Masters 1000 events in Miami, Cincinnati, and Shanghai.

However, Sinner is facing a potential suspension due to a doping case that emerged a few weeks ago, following an appeal by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).



SINNER

THE NEWS WORLD FROM AROUND WITH **MICHAEL OVIENMHADA**



The Nigerian Observer
...that the people may know

Teeth-breaking response from Iran

Just as some people never learn a lesson from history, countries led by people like that easily fall into the trap of mediocrity. Take a country like Iran for example—here's a country with unparalleled social, political and cultural history that could easily be a leader in the region, and a partner for progress with leading nations around the world. You may wear combat boots and carry a sword to do a revolution. However, once the revolution is over, you must pivot to the politics of governance, and for governance to succeed, efforts must be made to govern from the centre. If after a revolution, the leader stays in revolution mode longer than necessary, momentum will be lost, and the gains of the centre thinking will be lost for a long time especially as most regimes like that go into regime protection mode. Such it was with Chairman Mao Zedong in China. He stayed in the revolution zone until he died. That revolution mode cost 26 million Chinese lives during the cultural revolution. It took a Deng Xiao Ping to pivot China to some sort of middle which embraced capitalism to move China very quickly from a rural and sleepy superpower to world number two in a relatively short period of time.

Cuba also remained in the revolutionary mode. Just look at where Cuba is?

Recall what happened to Zimbabwe. Mugabe fired from both hips until his economy became comatose.

Compare that to Mandela. He immediately pivoted to the centre upon winning power. Clearly, years of imprisonment, and mistreatment had not done any damage to his sense of history and intellect.

It therefore beats my mind why Iran wants to bring destruction upon its citizens. If they carry out their so-called threat of "teeth breaking vengeance," one can only hope that it is very clear to them that Bibi will no longer be persuaded to temper a response. This time, he will go all out to deliver a mountain-penetrating response of earthquake proportions. Everything will become fair game, including the decapitation of the regime with plumes of smoke billowing from a 'Gazarized' Tehran. Bibi is not a normal human being. Iran should not bask in the mistake they have made. They must quit digging—not tomorrow, but now.

A COLOR-BLIND CONSERVATIVE PARTY

First it was a young man of Indian heritage as Prime Minister. Now, we have Kemi Badenoch, a 44-year-old software engineer, lawyer and politician. She has been nominated to serve as leader of the Conservative Party, and she is making history as the first black woman of direct African heritage to hold such an exalted position. She will be piloting an opposition party through a period of resurgence of



BENJAMIN NETANYAHU, ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER

a revitalized Labor Party. Barring any major economic crisis, the Labour Party may be in power for another 10 years. Kemi will be needing a lot of staying power to keep her party united until such a time as the people become tired of a 'non-performing' Labour Party.

As we congratulate her on her elevation as leader of the Conservative Party, it is hoped that she will surround herself with really selfless, and smart people to navigate the years of waiting in the shadows. What makes her rise so significant is itself what made Great Britain to be great in the first place, which was their adventurism, from exploring to slavery to colonialism to the building of the Commonwealth where the only thing that was common was the continuous flow of wealth from the former colonies to Britain. In her acceptance speech, she said, inter alia—"It is time to tell the truth. It is a time for renewal. It is a time to admit that mistakes have been made." By "mistakes", is she alluding to slavery and colonialism? Is Britain ready for an apology and reparations?

That would be a good place to begin. Enough of platitudes and band aids. Will people of courage step forward please!

HARRIS OR TRUMP?

In two days, America will be wrapping up the polls by 7pm everywhere across the continental United States. Before 3am that same night or by early morning, Wednesday, a pattern should start to emerge as to whom Americans want to pilot their country for the next four years. People are afraid in a way that they have never been historically because Donald Trump has told them exactly how he plans to take revenge. For him, this



ALI HOSSEINI KHAMENEI, IRANIAN SUPREME LEADER

election is existential. He needs it like oxygen to remain a free man. On the one hand, many people who worked for him in the past who have since come out to oppose him are scared of what he might do to them. On the other hand, Europe is skeptical of another Trump presidency that seeks to threaten the mutual interests that have existed in 80 years. Issues like NATO, the IMF, or climate change agreements may also be at risk.

STRANGE MATTERS ARISING IN NIGERIA

Sometimes, one has to wonder how far the Nigerian Police, our beloved men and women in uniform, would go in doing their "job."

Except of course if the video clip of children in detention that has been making the rounds is fake, it ought to be obvious enough to any trained officer that the people arrested for carrying Russian flags in the North during the hunger strikes are children. The way Nigeria goes, many of these children will never be missed in the first place because they are Almajiris of no fixed parentage or address. They will remain in prison for the next 5 years until they are old enough to be charged for armed robbery as replacements for real armed robbers who can pay to walk free. Northern Nigerian leaders I hope have now begun to see how their lack of interest in education has brought them so much joy, and peace with bandits, Boko Haram, kidnappers, etc.

Hail to the great North. A new bill for tax reform making the rounds may never see the light of day for many reasons, chiefly amongst which is that many Northern States contribute zero sums to the treasury. The question is: where do the drafters of the reforms want them to bring contributions from that will be matched by the Fed-

eral Government funding? Again, many of these States have chosen religion over simple economics, yet they want to share in VAT revenues that come from sinners. If these are some of the proposals in the tax reform bill, no one needs a soothsayer to tell them that the bill is DOA—dead on arrival. Unfortunately for everyone, for some reason of history and bogus census, the arid North has more population than the coastal South!

EDO STATE ABUZZ FOR INAUGURATION

It is amazing how much silence, and peace, and tranquility has suddenly enveloped Edo State since the elections were declared won and lost in September. It is hoped that many broken relationships would heal in time for the arrival of Christmas Jollof rice and chicken.

Activities have been lined up for the inauguration of the new Governor on November 12th. Someone was saying the other that no one appears to be enthusiastic to line up a goodbye party for the outgoing governor as was the case when Oshiomhole was leaving in 2016. It's been clear to many people that the outgoing governor did not share money, and so, he may not be expecting anyone to throw him a party. What is not known at this time is what, if anything, EFCC knows. Edo is already known as the number one State for petition writing. The petition writers may be waiting for the morning of November 13th, to begin to unleash their venom. Whatever the case may be, it is hoped that the incoming governor will plan to build on the Digitization Revolution of the Civil Service that Obaseki has obviously executed. It is also hoped that the gains of EdoBEST will be sustained as well as improvements on

the Internet cables that are being laid across the State. The new government must pivot on the Federal/State policy on roads, and come up with a body dedicated to fixing the first pothole that appears on any road anywhere in the State. We also hope that they will take advantage of the new Electricity Laws to build our own State Grid to give us 24-hour power. Will the governor arise in the image of the late great sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, to launch an agricultural revolution that is second to none in Nigeria? Only time will tell if he is coming to mark time or make history.

IS PEACE POSSIBLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

Any search for peace in the Middle East cannot possibly involve having Netanyahu around the peace table. The people of Israel should vote him out, and get themselves a leader who is ready to make the kind of sacrifice necessary for the emergence of a 2-State solution. Saudi Arabia may hold the key to peace in that region after all, but that is only if full-scale war does not break out between Israel and Iran before the Saudis get the chance to normalize relations with Israel on condition that a 2-State solution comes down the road.

THE GREAT DELUGE

Spain is reeling. The heavens let out its fury of rainfall meant to be distributed across one whole year in a period of 8 hours. The devastation accompanying the deluge could not have been predictable. Cars are piled up in heaps just as everything in the pathway of the raging waters were leveled to the ground. The people are fortunate that they do not build their homes like the Americans do with all wood. Otherwise, the consequences would have been far worse. Over 200 fatalities have been confirmed. Gladly, the people of Spain are volunteering in thousands to help in the cleanup.

What is not clear to this writer is this: What is climate change? When there's drought in a place, we blame it on climate change. When there's too much rain in a place, we blame it on climate change. Somewhere in Japan, at Mount Fuji, they are supposed to have a snow-covered mountain already by this time of the year. The mountain is still bare. They also say it's climate change. Can someone please explain exactly what climate change is? As things stand right now, when I'm in a group of educated and enlightened people, all I tend to do when the subject comes up is also to sound educated and enlightened.

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