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# SUNDAY REPORTS

TOR VANDE-ACKA  
MAKURDI

## Military Blamed For Poor Showing In Benue Bloodbath

- Local Officials, Leaders Worry Over Troops' Commitment
- OPWS, Homeland Security Mum Over Accusations
- Fear Of Another Attack Strong, Widespread

Grassroots leaders in Benue State have blamed military lapses for the killings in the state which have continued unabated despite the presence of troops.

Notable personalities in the state told Sunday Independent that in some cases the military, who drafted to the affected areas, appear to compromise their position, turning a blind eye to the activities of herdsmen militia who successfully carry out their nefarious activities in the affected communities.

The Logo LGA chairman, Clement Kav, and a community leader in the area, Chief Joseph Anawa, alleged connivance by the military.

The chairman said he would prefer that security agencies, other than the military, be deployed to keep the peace in the area because they had more confidence in them.

Chief Anawa blamed governments at all levels for not doing enough and showing the required commitment to stop the killings, hence attacks on Benue communities, particularly those in Logo and Katsina-Ala LGAs, had shot up in the last few months.

Apart from scores being killed and displaced in the last few months, property, crops like yam, rice, guinea corn and other staple food crops, including hectares of rice farm of the Ter Tyoshin, HRH Daniel Ayua Abomtse, were destroyed.

But contrary to what is happening in Logo and Katsina-Ala LGAs, the Chairman, Agatu LGA, Melvin James, said that peace had returned to some of the crisis-affected areas in the last one month.

### SECURITY PERSONNEL MUM

Meanwhile, efforts to get the Force Commander (FC), Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS), who has been elusive since he was deployed to head the Command, were unsuccessful.

Even though Sunday Inde-

pendent made efforts to get him to respond to the allegations and last week's attack on Logo and Katsina-Ala, for the better part of one week, his aides could not get him to respond to the allegations leveled against the military, and in particular, what OPWS was doing to salvage the situation.

After Sunday Independent made several efforts to speak with him, it was informed on Friday that the FC, OPWS, would not be able to comment on the matter until this week, since he was just returning from a trip.

Although our Correspondent was able to establish contact with the Director General (DG), Bureau of Homeland Security, Benue State, Air Commodore Jacob Gbamwuan, rtd, he refused to comment on the matter.

He argued that the state government would not discuss issues of security on the pages of newspapers or on air and explained that government had its security strategies that it intended to deploy.

He said Sunday Independent was free to carry out its independent investigations and make it public but insisted that "government cannot reveal to you its security strategies".

On his part, the Ter Tyoshin, HRH Daniel Ayua Abomtse, who is also the Chairman, Gwer-West LGA (Tyoshin) Traditional Council, Naka, Benue, lamented the attacks on his people, describing the Makurdi-Naka Road and the Naka-Agagbe Road as death traps, bringing economic and social activities to its lowest ebb.

He said: "Several persons have been kidnapped along Naka-Makurdi Road and Naka-Agagbe Road between February 8, 2011 to date.

"These roads are designated as death zones, bringing econom-

ic and social activities to ground zero.

"Since the cropping season, cattle freely graze on crops while security personnel remain unperturbed.

"Within this period, 577 persons have been murdered in cold blood in 13 years (this includes the number of 67 persons killed as from January to November 23, 2024). With a frequency of 47 attacks, about 47 persons were permanently maimed.

Chief Joseph Anawa, a Community Leader in Logo LGA and Media Aide to former Governor of Benue State, Senator Gabriel Suswam, lamented the recent attacks on Logo LGA, said: "In the recent attacks in Logo LGA and particularly, Gaambe-Tiev axis, between October and now, we lost over 100 people.

"There were about four attacks on Tombo council ward, three on Ayilamo and one at Azege, recently.

"There were three attacks on Mbaimiyande in Mbagbe council ward. There was another one on Anyiin, headquarters of Gaambe-Tiev Council Ward and then there has been series of attacks on Ukemberagya council ward.

"So, put all these together, we lost over a hundred people within this short period. Properties were destroyed, crops in the field: yam, rice, guinea corn, and the rest.

"The entire Ukemberagya, Tsarev council ward has been displaced; part of Tombo council ward displaced, part of Turan council ward (including Ayilamo) completely displaced.

"These displaced people, some of them are at Anyiin IDP camp, some at Ugba camp, while some are in Abeda.

"This one is not really an official camp, but they have decided to take over the primary school

at Abeda and, then, many others are squatting with relatives across the local government area."

On the attack on Tombo council ward last Sunday allegedly by hired foreign mercenaries, Chief Anawa said: "We have not been able to establish where they came from, but by every sense of judgement, because these attacks happen in the day time, none of them is in the night – so, we see these people as they come.

"We know the Fulanis that are around this area and these ones that came were very many. "Apart from that, the language they were speaking is different from the language these ones speak.

"They were not speaking Hausa, they were not speaking English, they were speaking a particular language which is alien to us, unlike the ones we know who speak Hausa.

"So, we suspect that they brought people outside this country who are mercenaries.

"As I speak to you, I have a report, not just too long ago, that many of them are crossing from the Nasarawa side, towards the Benue end, because of the recent attack that took place and because they were repelled by security agencies, they went and regrouped and are bringing in more people."

He added: "They (military) are not living up to expectations because their number is not enough.

"It is not the willingness – the willingness to protect lives and property may be there but the lack of manpower and the personnel is not there.

"These people come in hundreds and you have just about fifteen or twelve of them at a point, combined with civil defense, police, and others, so they cannot face these people (the

mercenaries), unless something tangible is done by deploying a large number of personnel to that area and station them there permanently.

### ALLEGED COMPROMISE

"In some attacks, we suspect high level of compromise, like the one that happened at Anyiin recently.

"There were some persons that were killed in front of the military station. They (military) were there and did not respond. So, it shows that they compromised in that case and many other places.

"Sometimes you call them, they don't come until the operation is over. Some operations last for over two to three hours; you call them and it is a distance they can cover in 30 minutes but they don't get there until the operation is over.

"And apart from that, since these things have been happening, we have never heard of any arrest.

"I have always blamed all arms of governments: the federal, state and local, for not doing enough. We are going through a horrible experience.

"The security personnel stationed in my place is being taken care of by my community, both logistics and anything you can think of. I am just giving you a practical example and that is what obtains all over the local governments.

"That should be government responsible, it should not be ours. And because they are not doing enough, we task ourselves to do what we are doing in order to have them stay in that place.

"I expect that government should live up to expectations and give these people enough logistics, give them good weapon, good mobility."

Corroborating the report of Chief Anawa, the Chairman, Logo LGA, Clement Kav, said: "We are looking for ways of getting more security personnel, particularly mobile policemen, to Anyiin because without them it would not be possible to ask our people to go back to the areas where they were displaced.

"I visited the area with some of our prominent sons whom we are counting on to assist us.

"Also, I got information that the armed militia that attacked us last week are regrouping and that they had crossed through into Benue, around Azege community, but we are yet to establish that fact.

"The military is not helping matters at all and based on reports from the areas, in some cases, they have allegedly coluded with the Fulani that attack our communities.

"They are there and our people are still being killed. There is an instance when some of the militia killed one of our sons, and the soldiers were just a stone throw away and they did nothing to stop them.

"We have more confidence in the mobile policemen, "Operation Zenda", SARS and the civil defense personnel that are posted to the area."

On his part, the Chairman, Agatu LGA, Melvin James, said: "Agatu LGA has been peaceful in the last one month because

of the deliberate steps we took, in terms of kinetic and non-kinetic actions by speaking to both sides.

"We personally got the approval of the CDS (Chief of Defense Staff) for the deployment of Naval personnel to the riverine areas.

"We also had several engagement meetings with the Fulani people, with the knowledge of the state government. We also got his (CDS's) approval for several soldiers on the land; our borders are now locked.

"We have peace for now and as I speak with you, we are putting modalities in place to relocate our people back to their ancestral homes. They were displaced from their communities for over one year now.

"There was an attack last year (2023), which displaced them and they started returning back on 3rd of January, 2024, and they were attacked on the same day.

"It was a daily attack on the communities since 3rd January, 2024, until the last one month.

"Before now, about 15 communities were sacked but these communities have started going back and are clearing the grasses in their communities and fixing some of their damaged infrastructure and even now, as I speak with you, the youths are also clearing the access road back to their communities."

On the number of casualties, the chairman said: "Based on the records we have here, we lost about 182 people before now, that is from 3rd January, 2024, to date.

"Among those that lost their lives, four soldiers, two Naval personnel; we also lost a policeman and two volunteer guards, the rest are civilians.

"At the moment, generally, the military is doing enough but I think as local government chairmen, we need to also deploy non-kinetic measures because the military can't be there forever.

"We all know that the strength of the Nigerian Army is not adequate to serve us forever."

### LURKING DANGER

Reacting to the recent attack in Katsina-Ala last Monday, Chairman of the LGA, Justine Shaku, said: "Even though there has been no major attack recently on the communities, the assailants are still lurking in the forests of the affected communities.

"Security men were drafted to the area and were in the community on Wednesday and Thursday. They respelled the herders out of the affected community but immediately the security personnel left, the armed herdsmen returned to the area and that has been the trend. However, there has not been any major incident since then.

"However, all the people in the area were displaced since the attack and they are scattered all over. Some left to nearby towns, while others are staying with their relatives in places other than their ancestral homes.

"But so far, we are yet to assess the number of those that were displaced. Whatever I tell you now will be guess work, but the displaced are large in number."



Abisola Olusanya, Commissioner for Agriculture and Food Systems, Lagos State (left); Babajide Sanwo-Olu, Governor, Lagos State (second left); Prince S J Samuel, Chairman, Origin Tech Group (middle); Adewale Anomo, Chairman of Ikosi Ejirin LCDA (second right), and Oluwarotimi Fashola, Special Adviser on Agriculture (Rice Mill Initiative) to the Governor, Lagos State, during a working visit to the Lagos Food Security Systems and Central Logistics Hub at Ketu-Ereyun, Epe, Lagos, on Saturday.

EJIKEME OMENAZU

LAGOS

## Economic Growth: NBS Figures Unreliable – Analysts

- Claim Statistics Illusionary, Not Reflective Of Realities
- Insist Report Intended To Please Political Leaders

Public sector watchers, including financial experts and analysts, have lampooned the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of regularly dishing out concocted figures on the nation's ailing economy.

Speaking with Sunday Independent on figures recently pushed out by the NBS on the state of the economy and unemployment, they insist that the agency's statistics cannot be relied upon.

They urged Nigerians not to be taking such figures seriously as they are skewed to please the government, thereby giving the false impression that the nation is witnessing growth and that things are getting better.

Recall that the NBS a few days ago claimed that Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 3.46 percent in the third quarter of 2024.

This is even when the nation's economy has been put on warning status by the World Instability Index (WII).

The NBS also had said that the nation's employment rate improved despite closure and exit of several companies, thereby turning legions of Nigerians into perpetual job hunters, with families living below poverty level, in hunger and misery.

Sir Frank Freds Nwosu, Member, Nigerian Institute of Management (MNIM) and Managing Director,

Business Innovations WA Ltd., while reacting to the reports, told Sunday Independent that maybe, it is really true that history repeats itself.

Nwosu quickly added that it is possible too that mankind never learns anything from history.

He said: "The recent calculations and figure outputs from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) are quite comforting to the hungry, trembling and roundly dejected citizens of this great nation.

"Beautifully, it seems encouraging also to the incumbent government, indicating that it is really progressing in its advertised slogan of Renewed Hope.

"However, past experience, common sense and clearly evident circumstances seem to ques-

tion this seemingly self-deceptive political propaganda.

"Remember that there was a time, during the heydays of the savings and loans schemes, the popular and vibrant building societies, and the reign of beautiful banks like Oceanic Bank, Savannah Bank, and their ilk, when wonderful paper figures, growth-indicating statements of accounts and flamboyantly rousing Annual General Meetings (AGMs) were in vogue.

"Funny enough, those who are old enough to have been in business between 1990 and 2000 AD will remember with the unforgettable sense of sadness, the financial losses we all encountered while believing these financial institutions' paper figures and investing more and more until they collapsed.

"I hope someone is not forgetting too early. I hope somebody is not attempting to remind us of what we direly need to forget.

"I hope to have my business hopes renewed with visible, verifiable, evidence-based innovations, not paper figures and computer-generated graphics, brainy bar charts and false histograms."

Tola Oresanwo, Director, Administration and Programmes, Centre for Anti-Corruption and Open Leadership (CACOL), told Sunday Independent that the NBS figures are on paper and mere academic submissions, devoid of national realities.

Oresanwo stated: "Real economic growth should be felt in the lives and living standards of Nigerians.

"As long as the cost of basic food items, fuel, transportation, etc., continues to rise as it is currently, negatively impacting the lives of average Nigerians, then the NBS is merely dishing out propaganda.

"The NBS ought to tell us the methodologies adopted that resulted in their submissions.

"The claim that unemployment is reducing is not only nebulous, but also bogus. Which sector of the economy is absorbing unemployed Nigerians, which

sector is creating the jobs?"

"I think the NBS sampling procedure should be finetuned so as to enable them to see beyond the walls of their office and operate like those who know what they are doing.

"It is a popular saying that statistics do not lie, but our experience in Nigeria has taught us that figures can be manipulated to favour the ruling class.

"NBS ought to guard against this so as not to lose the trust of the people."

Also contributing, Julius Adegunna, a media executive, told Sunday Independent, "It is very unfortunate that Nigerians prefer to hear and believe bad news, rather than celebrate good news about Nigeria when it comes.

"Both World Instability Index and Nigerian Bureau of Statistics work with figures and statistics at their disposal and they are both authorities in their spheres of influence.

"Whoever is analysing has the right to believe what he or she wants to believe.

"It is true that Nigeria has experienced financial turbulence

in the earlier part of the year, but that does not mean that Nigerians are not making adjustments.

"I will prefer we all work with the figures we know and understand in the belief that the Nigerian economy is adjusting to changes.

"While some companies are closing in Nigeria, some others are also opening. Another record said Nigeria has been growing in provision of self-employment."

Bishop Herbert Ekechukwu, a cleric and economist, in a chat with Sunday Independent, stated: "The reliability of National Bureau of statistics (NBS) hinges on accuracy of data collection.

"The economy is made up of the formal and informal sector. The informal sector is highly not regulated and not organised, hence collection of data becomes difficult, may be inaccurate, unreliable and non-representative.

"Even data from the formal or organised sector are subject to errors, bias and inconsistencies, hence, most statistical data most times do not reflect the true situation on ground.

"The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is calculated using a basket

of goods and services, but does not accurately reflect the spending pattern of all Nigerians.

"According to NBS, 63% or 133 million Nigerians are multi-dimensionally poor. They lack access to basic necessities like clean water, sanitation, health care and food security.

"However, looking at the situation on ground the percentage of Nigerians living below poverty level is far higher.

"The Nigerian employment rate has actually improved, but the real issue is that we have structured unemployment and low remunerations.

"People are doing jobs that are lower than their qualifications just to stay alive. The take-home package cannot take them home because of the economic situation."

On his own, Hon. Charles Anike, a businessman and National President of Eastern Union (EU), a political pressure group of the people of the Old Eastern Region (EU), stated: "Please, let us understand that the figures being projected by NBS are political figures, they are not realistic and they are very much aware.

"The figures were basically to deceive and calm the public, so that the ignorant ones will keep applauding them and believing

that they are making progress.

"There is nothing as criminal as deceiving oneself."

Professor John Ebhomien, a financial expert and a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Lagos, in his response, told Sunday Independent that the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) claim that Nigeria's GDP grew by 3.46 percent in the third quarter of 2024 is a joke taken too far.

Prof. Ebhomien, former World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) economist, "While the World Instability Index (WII) put the Nigerian economy on warning status, based on facts which are so glaring.

"The assertion by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) that the employment rate has improved despite closure of companies and mass retrenchment in the financial and productive sectors defies common sense and logic.

"My candid advice to the monetary and fiscal authorities is to create an enabling environment for business to thrive, reduce inflation, reduce expenditure on non-essentials, and put in place appropriate mechanisms for public spending probity and accountability."



Obadina Ahmed, Speaker, Alimosho Local Government Area House (left); Jelili Sulaimon Adewale, Chairman, Alimosho Local Government (second left); AbdulRasaq Ande, Glo Retail Chief, Lagos (middle); High Chief Rasak Mosaku, Baale Iyana Ipaja (second right), and Chukwuma Leonard, Managing Director, Talk Point Telecommunications, during the official opening of Gloworld Service Centre in Iyana-Ipaja, Alimosho, Lagos, at the weekend.

EJIKEME OMENAZU;

ITODE AKARI,

LAGOS / PORT HARCOURT

## PH Refinery: Doubts Persist Over NNPC's Claim

- It's Charade Meant To deceive Citizens – Onovo
- Navy Optimistic NNPC Will Achieve Crude Production Target

As the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited is still immersed in controversy over its celebrated landmark progress and return to production by the old Port Harcourt Refinery, critical stakeholders have slammed the company, accusing its executives of deliberate deception.

Chief Martin Onovo, one of the stakeholders, an engineer and petroleum sector expert, while reacting to the company's claim, described the reported rehabilitation of the old Port Harcourt refinery as a charade.

This is as some media reports this weekend claimed that operational activities in the refinery had been halted.

Speaking with Sunday Independent on Saturday, Chief Onovo, the 2015 presidential

candidate of the National Conscience Party (NCP), stated that the reported rehabilitation of the refinery was meant to deceive Nigerians.

Onovo, a seasoned activist and currently, Head, Policy Positions, Movement for Fundamental Change (MFC), insisted that the NNPC is a corrupt and ineffective organisation.

He stated: "The reported rehabilitation of the old Port Harcourt refinery has been confirmed to be a charade.

"It was orchestrated to deceive Nigerians. NNPC is a very corrupt and ineffective organisation. The leadership is incompetent, corrupt and weak.

"Since 2015, it has consistently failed to meet its own stated ob-

jectives. It has also continued to waste several trillions of Naira without achieving the desired goals.

"The case of the Port Harcourt refinery confirms our position. The NNPC announced the rehabilitation of the refinery in 2019. Typically, this scope of rehabilitation can be concluded in two years.

"In this case, the NNPC arranged a scam after it failed to complete the work even after five years.

At \$1.5 Billion, the cost of the work is definitely outrageous and yet the NNPC failed again. Now, the NNPC is issuing false and contradictory statements as usual.

"This scam must be thoroughly investigated and all those in-

dicted must face the full wrath of the law."

Recall that the Board and Management of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd), through a statement issued by Olufemi Soneye, Chief Corporate Communications Officer, NNPC Ltd, had few days ago, specifically on November 26, 2024, expressed what it termed "heartfelt appreciation to Nigerians for their support and excitement over the safe and successful restart of the 60,000 barrels-per-day Old Port Harcourt Refinery.

"This achievement marks a significant step forward after years of operational challenges and underperformance."

But, a cross section of Nigeri-

ans, including critical stakeholders and some oil bearing communities, have since then been querying the report, insisting that it was just a stage-managed face saving action after a series of failed promises by the company chiefs after the turn-around maintenance had gulped unaccounted fortunes.

Barrister Emeka Iheonu, a Lagos lawyer, while also speaking with Sunday Independent on the reported landmark achieve of NNPC which had already received President Bola Tinubu's accolades, stated: "The reported rehabilitation of one of the Port Harcourt refineries is a shocking surprise.

"Imagine a refinery that has been comatose over the years despite trillions of Naira purportedly spent on Turn Around Maintenances, suddenly springing to life a couple of months after the commissioning of Dan-

gote Refinery!"

Also, Osatohamhen Samuel Ebhohon, a core activist and public affairs analyst, told Sunday Independent that the nation's political class spends time and resources on half-hearted lies to create an illusion that progress is being made, instead of addressing the real issues.

### NAVY EYES CRUDE PRODUCTION TARGET

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Navy Ship, NNS PATHFINDER, has expressed optimism that the two million barrels per day crude oil production target of the Nigerian National Petroleum Limited (NNPC), can be achieved before the end of 2024.

The Commander, NNS Pathfinder, Commodore Cajethan Aniaku, said judging from the results achieved so far from its personnel, achieving the target may not be far-fetched.

## NEWS

SAMUEL OGIDAN  
ABUJAPDP Ready To Lead Opposition Coalition  
In 2027 – Deputy Youth Leader

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has denied the speculation that the state chapters and national leadership of the leading opposition party are in turmoil and weak.

Recall that the leading opposition party, the PDP has been embroiled in leadership crisis in the past months, a development, which was interpreted by political watchers as the partway to the end of the party.

It was insinuated that the conflicts in the opposition would work against the prospect of the proposed coalition consisting of PDP and other parties ahead of the 2027 poll.

Also, recalled that a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and former National Vice Chairman, North-West of the party, Dr. Salihu Lukman, had noted that all the other registered parties are in one way or the other being held to ransom with syndicated leadership cri-

sis.

He had said that the only thing that can guarantee the defeat of the APC and President Bola Tinubu in 2027 is if an opposition political platform can be created, which will have strong relationship with Nigerians.

The fears in the public space is that with leadership crisis in the opposition ahead of the 2027, could the PDP and other political parties muster the needed support to take over power from the ruling APC?

In response, the PDP has said, with the undying loyalty of Nigerians across the length and breadth of the country, the PDP is still a formidable party that is ready to take over government in 2027.

Speaking with our correspondent in Abuja, the Deputy National Youth Leader, Timothy Osadolor, when asked if the PDP is in turmoil and weak said,

"Your assertion that state chapters and national leadership of leading opposition, the PDP, are in turmoil and weak is not entirely true.

"Yes, it is true to the extent that the PDP of 1999 to 2012 was more hands on and very much bigger and goal getting than the PDP of today. But again, what PDP has gone through in the country since 2015 till date would have pulverised any other political party.

"The PDP is still a formidable brand today is thanks to the undying loyalty of Nigerians across the length and breadth of the country and the sacrifices of leaders across the 774 local government of the country and our high performing governors, who make the colleague governors feel inferior whenever the conversation has to do with issues of Character, Competence and capacity.

"Understanding the politics of today's, ruling government that has a world record in regime security actions, which are not limited to weaponisation of hunger and poverty, harassment and hounding of opposition political leaders and sowing of chaos in opposition parties and offering of irresistible appointments to many would have been critiques of this monstrosity called government of today.

"The Amb Umar Damagun led NWC deserves its flowers for not capitulating and selling off what we have as today PDP but rather rebuilding it and turning it into a formidable platform ready to take over government come 2027 poll."

He, however, prayed that the coalition conversation leads to a united platform that is capable of rescuing the country from the current government and her mal-administration.

Labour Party Chief Appeals To Tinubu  
To Reduce Duty On Imported GoodsEJIKEME OMENAZU  
LAGOS

Piqued by the hunger and suffering in the land, Hon. Tokunbo Paul Ayanlola, a Labour Party (LP) chieftain in Lagos State, has sent an urgent appeal to President Bola Tinubu to reduce Customs duty on imported products for Nigerians as the Christmas season approaches.

Hon. Ayanlola, the Labour Party's 2023 House of Assembly candidate in Lagos, in an open letter to President Tinubu made available to Sunday Independent at the weekend, lamented the suffering and hunger in the country, stressing that with the high cost of goods and services, Nigerians have been suffering great hunger and poverty.

He said: "As the festive season draws near, I, Hon. Tokunbo Paul Ayanlola, humbly appeal to His Excellency, Mr. President, to consider reducing cus-

toms duties on imported goods during this critical period.

"Christmas is a time of giving, celebration and unity for millions of Nigerians. However, the rising costs of imported goods, ranging from food items to essential commodities, have placed a significant burden on families and businesses.

"This situation threatens to dampen the joy and economic activities typically associated with the season.

"A temporary reduction in customs duties will not only make essential goods more affordable for Nigerians, but also stimulate trade and commerce.

"It will enable traders to bring in goods at more competitive prices, ensuring a vibrant and fulfilling holiday experience for all.

"Your Excellency, this gesture of goodwill will resonate with the spirit of the season and reaffirm your administration's commitment to easing the economic challenges faced by Nigerians."



Paul Mba, Senior Marketing Manager, LG West Africa (second left); Doris Onwuagba, Head of Digital Marketing, LG Electronics, West Africa Operations (middle); Moses Osime, PR Manager, LG Electronics (right), and members of the Grid Management Tea during 'The Optimism My Feed' campaign organised by LG Electronics in Lagos.

Courteville Business Solutions Group  
Graduates 25 Middle Management  
TraineesOLORUNDARE ENIMOLA  
LAGOS

Courteville Business Solutions Plc has successfully trained 25 New Middle Management Training Cadre of the company over a nine-month duration in a Capacity Development Programme designed to prepare them for the challenges of job and macro-economic environment.

At the special graduation held on Tuesday November 26, at the company's premises in Sabo, Yaba, the best graduating staff were given certificates, recognition and awards for their performances.

In his remark, Dr. Bola Akindele, the Group Managing Director/CEO of the company, revealed that this was the fifth set of graduands trained under the Middle Management Training Programme of the company, which was intentionally created to accelerate career development of the trainees for better performance, not only on the job, but also in other aspects of life.

He said, "As a company, we realised very early that there

was a huge gap in knowledge and experience for those younger staff to occupy Middle Management positions in the organisation.

"So, we decided on providing the requisite training that will adequately prepare them for the higher responsibilities.

"In addition, we designed the trainings that the graduates are exposed to, so that they are adequately prepared for the roles within our organisation, but also for greater roles in other businesses, companies and other life expectations."

He emphasised: "We bring experts in various fields to facilitate these trainings and to enrich the course modules, broadening their knowledge on so many areas that we know will be useful for them in life."

Alhaji Rafiu Ebiti, the Pro-Chancellor of Summit University, Offa, Kwara State, and chairman of the graduation ceremony, commended Courteville for providing such high powered trainings to their staff without any attachments to it, describing it a rare opportunity that staff hardly find with many employers.

## Tinubu Congratulates NUJ As Alhassan Yahaya Emerges President

INNOCENT OWEH  
ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has congratulated Alhassan Yahaya on his election as the President of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ).

Yahaya was elected at the 8th Triennial National Delegates Conference of the NUJ in Owerri on Wednesday.

In a statement issued on Saturday by his Special Adviser on

Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, the President also felicitated with other newly elected members of the NUJ executive.

He praised the union for organising a rancour-free election at the conference.

Tinubu said Yahaya's overwhelming victory was a testament to the NUJ members' confidence in his leadership qualities.

He expressed optimism that Yahaya's experience, particularly as the former deputy president of the union, would be instrumental

as he leads the Fourth Estate of the Realm.

The President emphasised the importance of the press taking on its constitutional roles with a renewed patriotic passion, aligned with the vision and efforts of the founding fathers of journalism in Nigeria.

Part of the statement read: "The President encourages Yahaya and the new leadership to address malpractices within the industry.

"He reiterates the administra-

tion's commitment to ensuring a free and independent media integral to deepening democracy and promoting national development.

"Tinubu expects Yahaya's tenure to reflect a strengthened commitment towards upholding journalism ethics while fostering a collaborative relationship with the government to build a just and equitable society.

"He wishes Yahaya and his team a successful and impactful term in office."

## World AIDS Day 2024: AHF Advocates Prevention, Testing, Treatment

TOR VANDE-ACKA  
MAKURDI

Aids Healthcare Foundation (AHF) has said that despite decades of combating HIV/AIDS, the end of the virus is not in sight, insisting that "it's not over", until AIDS is eradicated in Nigeria and globally.

It stated that at the level of Nigeria and indeed globally, it would continue to advocate for the fight against HIV/AIDS, as well as raising awareness for promoting prevention, testing, and treatment, and to rally support to all those affected by the

virus.

Therefore, the Foundation stressed that during the World AIDS Day event that would commence tomorrow, December 1, 2024, it would spotlight the challenges that had continued to stare it in the eye, defy solutions and also ensure that HIV/AIDS was made a priority on national and global public health agendas.

One of such activities that AHF intends to carry out to drive home its decision would be the hosting of radio programmes in Benue, Abuja,

Anambra, Cross River, Kogi, Nasarawa and Akwa Ibom states.

Apart from the programmes which would hold in the seven locations, Akwa-Ibom state is also expected to host an additional programme, which would be the main public ceremony, in which youth groups would display their dancing and singing skills in the presence of key Civil Society actors and government officials.

According to a statement made available to newsmen in Makurdi on Saturday, the AHF,

Africa Bureau Chief, Dr. Peninah Lutung, noted that AHF plans to emphasise the urgent need to enhance HIV prevention efforts, particularly for young women and adolescent girls who are at significant risk of contracting the virus.

The Bureau Chief, further stated that "With the introduction of innovative prevention tools—like the Dapivirine vaginal ring to Lenacapvir, PrEP, and PEP—our ability to halt new transmissions has never been greater. Nonetheless, we must also prioritise condoms,

which are both effective and affordable yet still under-promoted.

"Furthermore, increased funding for HIV/AIDS, community-led initiatives, and favorable policies to fight stigma and discrimination remain crucial for expanding access to prevention and treatment, especially for at-risk groups and in the global effort to control AIDS.

"On this World AIDS Day, we emphasise the urgent need to enhance HIV prevention efforts, particularly for young women and adolescent girls who are at

significant risk, with around 4,000 new HIV infections recorded globally each week," she stated.

Also lending his voice to the issues, AHF Nigeria, Country Programme Director (CPD), Dr. Echeje Ijezie, noted that "In Nigeria, AHF is particularly reinforcing the need to embrace Comprehensive age-appropriate Sexuality Education (CSE), to empower adolescents and young people with skills and knowledge to negotiate safer sexual behaviors, with the population being the most at risk to STIs (sexually transmitted diseases) including HIV/AIDS."

## Festive Season: GOtv Unveils Top Line-up Of Shows This December

GOtv has unveiled an exciting line-up of top local shows for the festive season, starting from Sunday December 1.

Lovers of local content will enjoy a wide range of Nollywood movies on Africa Magic Showcase. Movies such as Jump, starring Ruth Kadiri, will air on December 1 on Showcase.

Phil's Love Story, featuring Uche Montana and Daniel Etim Effiong, and Eternal Flame, featuring Maurice Sam and Regina Daniels, will air on December 6 and 7, respectively.

Swapped Fate, featuring Frances Ben and Blossom Chukwujekwu, and The Little Man, starring Ruth Kadiri and Eddie Watson, will air on December 15 and 21, respectively. Greener Pasture, starring Chibuzor Stanley, will also air on December 27 on Showcase.

Showcase.

Fans of comedy shows are not left out, as Bovi Comedy Special episodes 1 to 3 will air on Showcase from 24 to 25 December at 6 pm daily, with repeats of Episode 1 on December 28, episode 2 on January 4, 2025, and Episode 3 on January 11, 2025 at 7 pm on Showcase.

GOtv customers will also enjoy the GOtv festive open window, starting from December 13. It is available on all GOtv subscription plans.

The Golden Window offer is open to all GOtv subscribers. To enjoy the offer, customers can reconnect or upgrade using the MyGOtv App or the USSD code (\*288#). Customers can also download the GOtv Stream app to watch their favourite shows on the go.

## Rivers Police Arrest Wheelbarrow Pusher Over Female Lover's Death

ITODE AKARI  
PORT HARCOURT

A wheelbarrow pusher simply identified as Peter, a Benue State indigene, has been arrested by detectives of the Nkpulu Police Division in Mile 3 Diobu area of Port Harcourt over the death of his female lover simply identified as Mummy, an Ogoni indigene in Rivers State.

Our correspondent learnt that the deceased who sells perishable food items at Bishop Okoye street, died at her lover's house on Thursday after she visited him to pass the night there.

It was gathered that the wheelbarrow pusher, Mr Peter, in the early hours Friday, the

next day, raised an alarm after discovering the lifeless body of his lover.

A source in the neighbourhood disclosed that the neighbours, following the development, alerted the police who got to the scene for on-the-spot assessment, arrested the prime suspect and evacuated the body as the cause of the death of the victim was yet to be ascertained.

Meanwhile, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the Rivers State Police Command, SP Grace Iringe-Koko, who confirmed the incident, added that the suspect had been arrested, while investigation was ongoing.

"The suspect has been arrested, investigation is ongoing," she stated.

## 'Best Private School Award' Confirms Caleb Group's Quality – Adebogun

The Director, Caleb Group of Schools, Dr. Ola Adebogun, has described the Lagos State's 'Best Approved Private Primary School for 2024 President's Teachers and Schools Excellence Award' presented to the group as a confirmation of its insistence on due process, recruitment of high quality staff and conformity to quality assurance standards stipulated by government and other regulatory bodies in the nation's education sector.

The award was presented to the school by the Office of Education Quality Assurance in the State's Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, to Caleb International School.

Adebogun, who stated this in his remarks on the award, stressed that the Caleb Group of Schools noted with delight the Office of Education Quality Assurance' recognition of the school's outstanding commitment to excellence in teaching and significant contributions to quality education.

He stated that the Office of Education Quality Assurance' remark that the school's passion and perseverance serve as inspiration to both learners and educators, was a further confirmation that the Caleb Group of Schools was setting the pace for

others to follow.

The educationist noted that the award was a testimony that the school had lived up to its expectation of ensuring production of quality students that would contribute positively to national growth.

Adebogun explained that the feat was achieved with the concerted efforts of both the academic and non-academic staff who were committed to the educational development and well-being of students principally for the production of quality manpower and capacity building for national advancement.

He recalled that the same Office of Education Quality Assurance in the Lagos State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education had, in the past, noted in the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) exercise then carried out that the school was of high standard with remarkable learners' achievement, both nationally and internationally.

The Visitor to Caleb University commended the Office of Education Quality Assurance for its recognition of outstanding performance of schools, regular evaluation exercise and insistence on sanity in the state education sector, thereby averting the tragedy of churning out sub-standard products.

JOY ANIGBOGU  
LAGOS

The Kogi State government has expressed shock over the boat accident that occurred in Kupa Ebbe village early hours of Thursday, killing several people.

According to a statement on Saturday signed by Kingsley Femi Fanwo, Commissioner for Information and Communications, the boat transporting passengers from Kupa Ebe to Katcha Market capsized near Kpata Danbo, resulting in significant casualties.

The National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA) had revealed that the boat that capsized on Friday in the waterways of the Ebe community in Kupa South Local Government Area of Kogi State left an abandoned jetty around 1 am.

Reports claim that over 200 passengers of the ill-fated boat had remained unaccounted for and that eight bodies had already been brought out of the water as

## Kupa Boat Mishap: Kogi Govt Expresses Shock, Condoles With Victims

### ● Calls For Safer Marine Transportation

of Saturday morning.

In a statement signed by the NIWA management very late on Friday, the Authority said that it had set up an investigation panel to ascertain the real cause of the accident, the total number of passengers on board, and the owner of the craft.

"While rescue efforts are still ongoing, it has been confirmed that 24 victims have been rescued and are currently receiving medical care in nearby health facilities. Sadly, many more are feared dead.

"The state government extends its heartfelt condolences to the families who have lost loved ones in this unfortunate incident. Our thoughts and prayers are with you during this difficult time.

"We remain committed to

supporting rescue efforts and are working in close collaboration with State and Federal agencies to minimize the loss of life.

"His Excellency, Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo, has directed the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) to provide immediate relief materials to affected families.

"Additionally, the Ministry of Health has been instructed to ensure that survivors receive adequate medical attention.

"We commend the swift response and cooperation of the National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA) and River Marshals, as well as the authorities of Katcha Local Government Area in Niger State, who have worked tirelessly alongside Kogi and Federal officials to address the situation.

"In light of this tragedy, the Kogi State government calls for stricter safety measures in marine operations across the state. We urge operators in the water transportation sector to avoid night voyages and to adopt safety protocols that can help prevent such incidents in the future.

"The government is committed to implementing legal and administrative frameworks to safeguard the lives of both operators and passengers using water transportation.

"We appeal to the Marine Marshals and all other agencies involved in rescue operations to intensify their efforts to save more lives.

"May the souls of the departed rest in peace, and may their families find the strength to bear this loss."



Larry Ayodeji, Chief Executive Officer, Intra-Continental Media Network and African representative of the University of Brasil, Campinas (left); Kolawole Anunlopo, Chief Executive Officer, Integrated Estate Services Ltd/award recipient (middle), and Prof. Joel Michael, representative of the Vice Chancellor, during the award ceremony held in Lagos, at the weekend.

EJIKEME OMENAZU  
LAGOS

The Centre for Anti-Corruption and Open Leadership (CACOL), has expressed satisfaction over the resolution of the controversy concerning former Kogi governor, Yahaya Bello, and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Speaking exclusively with Sunday Independent in Lagos at the weekend, Debo Adeniran, CACOL Chairman, a veteran activist and anti-graft promoter, maintained that the minimum action expected from the anti-graft agencies is that suspects are arrested and prosecuted according to the laws of the land.

Adeniran maintained that it is the judiciary that finds suspects guilty once the procedures are followed, instead of media trials or unnecessary drama by anti-graft agencies.

He stated: "The initial argument was that the suspect, Bello, was properly invited. A suspect is not invited by telephone.

"The EFCC should not be bombarding people's homes. They should not be overzealous.

"Bello was earlier in their office and they saw him and discussed with him and allowed him to leave without interrogation.

"That he went there now by

## Adeniran, CACOL Boss, Commends Resolution Of Ex-Gov. Bello, EFCC Controversy

### ● Lauds Senate On RMAFC Bill, Tasks Tinubu

himself shows that he was not running away. The onus is on the EFCC to further prove that there are justifiable grounds to arrest him."

Meanwhile, the anti-graft body has commended the Senate for passing the Bill for an Act to amend the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) Act.

It also asked President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to sign the Bill into law as passed by the Senate.

The Centre explained the significance of the bill, which granted RMAFC enforcement powers in the monitoring of accruals to and disbursement of revenue from the Federation Account and brought the Act in conformity with the nation's Constitution.

In a statement signed by CACOL Chairman, Comrade Debo Adeniran, the group noted that the bill as passed by the National Assembly seeks to repeal the RMAFC Act, 2004, and replace it with the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation, and Fiscal Commission Bill, 2024, insisting that the Act, last updated over two decades ago, no longer re-

flects the nation's evolving economic realities.

It would be recalled that the Senate recently passed the bill that seeks to empower the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation, and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) to monitor accruals to, and disbursements from, the Federation Account.

The bill was passed following its consideration and adoption of the report by the Senate Committees on National Planning and Economic Affairs, Finance, and Appropriations during a plenary.

The proposed legislation, according to the Chairman of Senate Joint Committees on National Planning and Economic Affairs, Finance and Appropriations, Senator Yahaya Abdullahi, revised the composition and operational framework of the commission to ensure that federal, state, and local governments receive the constitutionally mandated resources necessary to address governance and development challenges.

According to him, the primary objective of the bill, which prescribes a revamped struc-

ture and operational method for the commission, is to reinforce the mandate and powers of the RMAFC as the constitutionally recognised body responsible for monitoring revenue generation and ensuring its equitable disbursement among the three tiers of government.

As one of 14 executive bodies recognised by the 1999 Constitution, CACOL said the RMAFC "is one of the most poorly funded agencies compared to other sister constitutional bodies like Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Population Commission (NPC), National Assembly and others that are heavily funded from the national purse."

Consistent with the 1999 Constitution, the statement noted that RMAFC was established to monitor the accruals of federally generated revenues to the Federation Account and disburse same to the three tiers of government.

He stressed that with these roles, RMAFC has enormously contributed to the democratisation process, thus encouraging good governance, transparency and accountability and even development in the country.

## NEWS

# CAN Seeks Objective Evaluation Of Airstrip Licence Granted To Living Faith Church

EJIKEME OMENAZU;  
TOYIN ADEBAYO  
LAGOS/ABUJA

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body of Christians in the country, has called for objective evaluation of the airstrip licence granted to the Living Faith Church.

Archbishop Daniel Okoh, the CAN President, made the call in a statement made available to Sunday Independent on Saturday.

Archbishop Okoh, in the statement titled, 'A Call for Objective Evaluation of the Living Faith Church Airstrip Licence', noted that the recent government's decision to grant a licence for the construction of an airstrip at the Living Faith Church head-

quarters in Ota, Ogun State, had drawn significant attention and concern from some members of the House of Representatives.

These concerns, he stressed, primarily revolve around national security and the potential misuse of private airstrips.

Okoh, stressed that the scrutiny from lawmakers had highlighted a climate of suspicion, fuelled by past incidents unrelated to the current context.

He maintained, however, that while it was crucial to acknowledge the legitimate security concerns expressed, it was equally important to recognise the church's adherence to all regulatory procedures in securing this licence.

Okoh stressed: "The Minister of Aviation, Festus Keyamo, has affirmed that the church met all

necessary safety and legal requirements.

"As the House Committees on Aviation and Legislative Compliance undertake their investigation, it is imperative that this process remains transparent and impartial.

"To prematurely associate the church with potential illegal activities without substantive evidence, risks undermining the integrity of both religious institutions and regulatory bodies.

"The church stands firm on its commitment to legality and transparency."

Okoh urged the lawmakers to consider the broader implications of their actions and rhetoric, ensuring that religious undertones would not cloud objective judgement.

He stressed: "The church has

always been a stronghold for peace, development, and community service.

"It is essential to recognise that revoking the licence without substantial evidence could unjustly undermine the rights of religious organisations and set a troubling precedent for future cases.

"Demonising its efforts without just cause does a disservice not only to the church but to the principles of justice and fairness that bind our nation.

"As we await the outcome of the investigation, we call on all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue and cooperation.

"Let this be an opportunity to strengthen, rather than fracture the trust between religious communities and the state."



Emmanuel Audu, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Systems, Lagos State (left); Mark Van Rensbury, South African farmer/African Livestock Exports (second left); Herman De Bruin, Veterinarian, Kerkstraat Animal Clinic/African Livestock Exports (third left); Abisola Olusanya, Commissioner for Agriculture and Food Systems, Lagos State (fourth left); Prof. Abdul Kadir U. Junaidu, Veterinarian, African Livestock Exports/Origin Tech (fourth right); Albert Lounster, Animal Scientists, African Livestock Exports (third right); Kunle Olorode, Senior Industrial Adviser, Origin Tech (second right), and Rasheed Macaulay, Director, Veterinary Services, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Systems, Lagos State, after a meeting with expertise from south African on cattle feedlot/transit station, held in Lagos, on Friday.

CHIBUZOR EMEJOR  
ABUJA

The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) has on Friday inducted the second cohort of its Non-Resident Fellowship Programme (NRFP), designed to champion evidence-based policy making in Nigeria.

A statement issued by NESG explained that the induction of non-resident fellows underscored its commitment to bridging the gap between socio-economic research and public policy in Nigeria.

According to NESG, "The NRFP is designed to foster collaboration among leading experts to produce actionable insights that

## NESG Inducts Second Cohort Of Non-Resident Fellows To Champion Evidence-Based Policymaking

influence evidence-based policy making.

"This 18-month edition leverages the expertise of distinguished fellows to address Nigeria's pressing challenges.

"By strengthening the connection between research and governance reforms, the programme contributes to sustainable development in a complex and dynamic global environment."

In his keynote address, Dr. Tayo Aduloju, Chief Executive Officer of the NESG, described the NRFP as a "beacon of knowledge" and a transformative platform for driving impactful gover-

nance reform.

He highlighted the first cohort's achievements, including impactful cluster reports and positive feedback from stakeholders.

"The NRFP is a testament to our dedication to shaping Nigeria's development agenda through high-quality research and evidence-based policies," Dr. Aduloju noted.

He also emphasised the NESG's vision of building a Pan-African network of economists and researchers to foster transformative, cross-border conversations that drive Africa

toward global competitiveness.

Dr. Olusegun Omisakin, Director of Research at the NESG, welcomed the new cohort by emphasising the importance of collaboration in addressing Nigeria's developmental challenges.

He noted that members of the first cohort had become integral to the NESG's research ecosystem, contributing to broader projects and strengthening the research department's capabilities.

He also stressed the need to focus on governance, inclusive growth, and critical sectors such as trade and the economy.

## Sultan Foundation Commemorates 16 Days Of Activism Against GBV In Yobe

MOHAMMED ABUBAKAR  
DAMATURU

The Sultan Foundation for Peace and Development, in collaboration with the UN Women LEAP Project 2024, commemorated the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Yobe State.

The event, tagged 'Unite to End Violence Against Women and Girls', was held at the Emir of Fika's palace in Potiskum town.

The Emir of Fika and Chairman, Yobe State Council of Traditional Rulers, Dr. Muhammad Ibn Abali Muhammad Idrisa, welcomed guests to the significant event.

He emphasised the importance of sensitising communities on the pressing issue of violence against women and girls.

Dr. Idrisa commended the Yobe State government for introducing the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law 2022, which would help reduce violence cases.

Amina Muhammad Ali, Project Officer, gave an overview of the programme, explaining that the Sultan Foundation was working in four project states to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

She revealed that the foundation was leveraging the structures of traditional and religious leaders to drive the message and end GBV.

The event featured a lecture on 'Understanding the GBV Concept and Its Harmful Effects on the Community', by Barrister Hannatu Farouk Jauro, Chairperson of FIDA Yobe.

Discussions on GBV were held by resource persons Malam Hassan Goni Ahmed and Mohammed Ali Baka, while the Emir of Fika led the resolutions and way forward.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual global initiative that runs from November 25 to December 10, highlighting that violence against women is the most pervasive violation of human rights worldwide.

## AAC Laments Poor State Of Newly Commissioned Ofali Agwu Digital Smart School In Abia

EJIKEME OMENAZU  
LAGOS

The African Action Congress party (AAC), Abia State chapter, has called for financial transparency over the Ofali Agwu Digital Smart School, facilitated by Chief Ibe Okwara Osonwa, the Member representing Arochukuwu/Ohafia Federal Constituency.

The party said it was compelled to address issues relating to the commissioning of the Smart School on November 28, 2024, in view of the absence of state-of-the-art facilities in the newly commissioned constituency project.

It noted that Governor Alex Otti commissioned the Digital Smart School, even when as a constituency project, the Digital Smart School lacked basic ICT gadgets.

## Public Service Games: Rivers Hospitality, Officiating Excites Athletes, Officials

ITODE AKARI  
PORT HARCOURT

As the 43rd edition of the Public Service Games enters its third day, officials have begun to express their excitement over the hospitality of Rivers State, as well as the professional officiating of the eight-day sports festival.

The games, which kicked off on Wednesday November 27, was expected to end on December 5, 2024, with about 10,000 athletes drawn from the 36 states of the federation, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Speaking with our correspondent on Saturday, Male Volleyball Coach for the National Assembly Service Commission, Richard Benson, said his team had a lot

AAC said: "While we acknowledge the government's efforts to enhance educational infrastructure, we find it necessary to seek transparency regarding the financial aspects of this project, particularly given the limited resources allocated to it."

Comrade Ezumaibe Kelechukwu, AAC's State Chairman, in a statement made available to Sunday Independent, expressed surprise that a Smart School was commissioned with only one smart television.

The party lamented that there was no information and Communication Technology (ICT) and other required gadgets, a development which, it stressed, raised significant concerns about the true cost of the initiative.

The AAC stated: "We demand a comprehensive breakdown of the expenses involved in the establishment of this facility.

of fun during the games.

Benson, whose team defeated the Federal Ministry of Interior, said: "So far, we just played our second game against the Ministry of Interior and God helped us, we won 2-0.

"The officiating and the organising have been so fantastic, we are actually having fun here. As it is, we are even praying that the games should not end because we are having fun.

"The environment is equally fantastic, people of Rivers State are very welcoming and receptive. Sincerely speaking, we are happy."

Meanwhile, the female handball team from the Office of Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SFG), Stella Marris Ollisa, expressed optimism of retaining the title they won in the last edition.

## LG Electronics Amplifying Positive Narratives Across Nigeria

CHIOMA UMEHA  
LAGOS

LG Electronics brought together content creators from across Nigeria for the LG Insider Experience, a ground-breaking event held at the LG Academy in Victoria Island, Lagos, riding on the success of the brand's earlier campaign, Optimism My Feed.

The event celebrated the power of positive storytelling and explored new avenues to spread

uplifting narratives far and wide.

Tagged 'The Optimism My Feed campaign', the initiative provided a platform for people to share inspiring and hopeful stories, intentionally filling social media feeds with content that promotes optimism.

On the campaign's success, the Managing Director, LG Electronics, West Africa, Hyoung Sub Ji, represented by the Senior Marketing Manager, LG West Africa, Paul Mba, remarked: "At LG Electronics, we know that

positivity is transformative.

"Through 'Optimism My Feed', we sparked conversations around the beauty and possibilities in life, and the response was incredible. The LG Insider Experience was our way of taking this initiative to the next level."

The event featured interactive sessions and workshops designed to equip content creators with tools to craft impactful stories.

Attendees explored how to use their platforms to champion optimism and inspire hope, reinforcing

LG's mission to make positivity a cornerstone of everyday life.

LG Electronics' Head of Digital Marketing, West Africa, Doris Onwuagba, highlighted the event's objectives thus: "The LG Insider Experience was about building a community of creators, who share our vision of a world driven by positive narratives.

"Together, we are making optimism not just a campaign but a movement that uplifts individuals and transforms society."

## OCCIMA Honours 15 Persons With 'Nigeria's Most Eminent Business Award'

ANOLU VINCENT  
OWERRI

The Owerri Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (OCCIMA) has held its 'Nigeria's Most Eminent Business Award' where categories of awards were given to 15 prominent men and women, who have distinguished themselves in various fields of life.

This is as the chamber has reiterated its determination to sustain its common contact and representative forum for members to exchange ideas concerning industrial business operations in Owerri, Imo State and beyond.

It also informed of its determination to continue to assist its members to solve their business problems with government agencies, foreign embassies and firms.

Anthony Amadi, a lawyer and president of the present organisation (OCCIMA), disclosed this in his remarks during the OCCIMA's 'Nigeria's Most Eminent Business Award', 2024, ceremony, held in Owerri.

Amadi commended Governor Hope Uzodimma, the Grand Patron of OCCIMA, Rex Anunobi, the Imo State Commissioner for Trade and Investment, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)

delegates, etc.

He stated that the essence of the "award was to encourage those who have distinguished themselves in various fields of endeavour, impacting people positively so as to do more, because to whom much is given, much is expected."

The theme of the award, 'Public and Private Sector Partnership: Key to Sustainable Economic Growth in Imo State', the OCCIMA boss urged captains of industries and other business enthusiasts, who graced the ceremony to register with OCCIMA and take advantage of its benefits to scale up their businesses.

Ifeanyi Olugbu, former member of the Imo State House of Assembly for Mbaitolu Constituency, and chairman of the occasion, spoke in tandem with Emmanuel Amadi, the representative of the Technological Incubation Centre, Naze Owerri, and commended the leadership of OCCIMA for the proactive step to give honour to whom honour is due.

He stressed that the award was devoid of partisan politics, parochialism, favouritism and sentiment, and hailed Governor Hope Uzodimma, the patron of OCCIMA, for his warm disposition to the body. He also enjoined the governor to sustain the spirit.

## PITO Nite Set For Dec 29 To Celebrate Ososo Culture

SEYI TAIWO-OGUNTUASE  
LAGOS

Come December 29, Project Independence to Ososo (PITO), a socio-cultural group, will host this year's edition of PITO Nite, an event dedicated to celebrating Ososo's rich culture and strengthening community ties.

Tunde Ajayi, the founder and organiser of the event in a statement, said that Ososo, a picturesque town in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State, will come alive with vibrant energy and cultural festivities as it hosts one of its biggest annual events.

The event, which according to him, would be held at the Ososo Cultural and Vocational Centre, tagged, 'Folklore Challenge,' promises to be a remarkable evening of music, art and culture.

"PITO Nite is more than just an event; it is a celebration of creativity and accomplishments by an organisation deeply committed to empowering the community," he said.

He noted that the group had undertaken impactful projects such as skill acquisition programmes, promotion of iconic Ulalo/Ukperori Fabrics, and provision of platforms for musicians to hone and showcase their talents.

He said that the event would serve as a well-deserved moment of joy and reflection for its members and the larger Ososo community, while winners in the folklore chal-

lenge would smile home with N100,000, N30,000 and N20,000 for the first, second, and third respectively.

Line-up of activities, according to him, would reflect the rich cultural heritage and artistic dynamism of Ososo, stating that attendees should look forward to cultural displays, which would be a showcase of traditional performances and local customs that would feature both upcoming and renowned artists.

Ajayi said that the event was expected to draw notable Ososo sons and daughters, alongside guests from across Nigeria and the diaspora.

One of the highlights of the evening would be the performance by Zealano, a celebrated music star and the leader of the PITO Nite organising team, known for his electrifying stage presence, among other talented artists.

He added that over the years, PITO Nite had become a beacon of multi-cultural expression, hosting both local and international performers and had continued to be a space where artists, either emerging or established, could share their creativity with a diverse audience.

"As the countdown begins, excitement is building for what promises to be an extraordinary evening. PITO Nite 2024 is not just an event; it is a testament to the power of culture, creativity, and community in shaping a brighter future for Ososo and beyond," he said.

FRANCIS ONOIRIBHOLO  
BENIN

Monday Okpebholo, governor of Edo State, has accused his predecessor, Godwin Obaseki, some members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and editors of some leading newspapers, of alleged grand plan to orchestrate a media trial to discredit his victory in the September 21, 2024 governorship election, and his administration.

The governor, who made the accusations in a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Fred Itua, was reacting to the claim by former Aviation Minister, Osita Chidoka, that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) manipulated the election in favour of the Edo governor.

According to him, "We are aware that former Governor Godwin Obaseki and some PDP leaders in Edo State, and their supporters had a meeting during the week, with online merchants and editors of leading newspapers; where it was decided that media trial should be the pattern of their current engagement to discredit the very credible Edo election of September 21.

"The truth of the matter is

## Okpebholo Accuses Obaseki, Editors Of Gang-up To Discredit Edo Guber Poll

that INEC conducted a very free and fair, violence-free election acknowledged by domestic observers in their various reports.

"The PDP leadership in Edo State, in its review and report, also acknowledged that APC won the election.

"The latest drama of Osita Chidoka amounts to merely beating about the bush, trying to rake up mud against the election. The PDP should allow the tribunal to do its job in line with established procedures.

"The idea of deploying the services of editors and senior journalists with a marching order to discredit the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo by all means possible is outlandish and self-serving.

"Their identities are now known, and will be made public in the coming days. We can see that they have resorted to the social media spaces, pages of national newspapers and pliable national televisions, to push their ugly narratives that Governor Okpebholo did not win the September 21 governorship election in Edo State.

"By this, we make them all aware that Governor Monday

Okpebholo is making good progress in office as the duly elected governor with an irrevocable mandate for the next four years."

Okpebholo further alleged that his attempt to verify assets of the state, to recover "stolen cars and other assets from Obaseki's criminal allies, and probe, if necessary, the financial heist orchestrated by the last administration," triggered the desperate moves to vilify his election.

Itua further stated: "As the duly-elected governor of Edo State, Governor Monday Okpebholo will not be blackmailed by media propaganda and or paid social media contractors.

"He has vowed to recover every dime or asset stolen by officials of the Obaseki administration.

"In the coming days, more revelations about the financial heist, contract scams, abuse of power and destruction of Edo State, orchestrated by the Obaseki-led administration, will be made known to Edo people.

"This is necessary, as his own progress and contributions to the development of the state

must be reliably measurable and fair, when he is assessed.

"Governor Okpebholo has since hit the ground running, and will not be distracted by the shenanigans of paid PDP agents.

"He will continue to work hard for Edo people and remedy the mess created by the Obaseki-led administration in eight years."

He warned that Okpebholo "will not sit back and allow a few individuals, who are too timid to allow the will of Edo people to stand, sabotage the state."

He added: "Anyone who runs afoul of the law will face the full wrath of the law. Moles and saboteurs planted in different ministries, departments and agencies of government by Obaseki and his cohorts, will soon be exposed, and nothing will stop Governor Monday Okpebholo from standing on the side of truth, fairness, integrity and progress."

When contacted, the Caretaker Publicity Secretary of PDP, Chris Nehikhare, said he was aware of the allegation and was going to respond, but was yet to do so as at the time of filing this report.



Tolulope Medebem, President, Experiential Marketing Association of Nigeria (EXMAN) (left); Pai Gamde, Chief Talent Officer, Coronation Group (second left); Ngozi Akinyele, Chief Marketing and Communication Officer, Coronation Group (second right), and Segun Mcmedal, President/Chief Executive Officer, Upticomm Marketing Company, during the presentation of the award for the Most Outstanding Women in Communication Awards (WIMCA) 2024 in Lagos.

## Gov Abiodun Seeks NYSC Support For His 'Future-Together Agenda'

APATA OYENIRAN  
LAGOS

Prince Dapo Abiodun, the Ogun State governor, has enjoined corps members deployed to the state to join in the implementation of his administration's agenda of building a future together.

Governor Abiodun gave the charge at the Sagamu International Stadium Permanent Orientation Camp of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) at the formal swearing-in of 2024 Batch C Stream 1 Corps Members deployed to the state for the mandatory one year national service.

Abiodun, who was represented by Hon. Wasiu Isiaka, the state's Commissioner for

Sports Development, said his administration recognised the place of youth as drivers of economic, social, and political development, assuring of increased commitments to creating an enabling environment for corps members to explore their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the state's advancement.

He said, "Ogun State remains a leader in youth development and empowerment, as reflected in the robust job creation, poverty alleviation, and food security initiatives.

"These efforts are part of our deliberate strategy to foster prosperity, particularly for our youth, and to ensure the continued progress of our state."

He urged the corps mem-

bers to harness that greatness as they take on the challenges and opportunities of the service year, saying creativity and innovation are key drivers of success.

Earlier in her introductory address, Mrs Olayinka Diana Nasamu, the NYSC Ogun State Coordinator, congratulated the corps members on the completion of their various academic programmes.

Nasamu informed the corps members that the service year had been carefully planned and divided into four cardinal programmes of Orientation, Primary Assignment, Community Development and Passing Out Parade.

She appealed to the corps members to take every as-

pect of the orientation very seriously, particularly the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme, which would equip them with various skills during and after the orientation.

She informed the governor that the 1,697 corps members, comprising 647 males and 1,050 females, had been well behaved since arrival at the camp.

Appreciating the support of Governor Abiodun in the scheme of NYSC activities and needs, Nasamu said, "I expressed profound gratitude to His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Ogun State, Prince Dapo Abiodun, for the numerous supports and attention the NYSC scheme had consistently received in the state, particularly regarding the prompt attention to our requests and the safety of our corps members.

## NEWS

# #EndBadGovernance: Lagos Lawyer Tasks NBA On Amnesty Report, Insists On Rule Of Law

EJIKEME OMENAZU  
LAGOS

**A**Lagos lawyer, Barrister Emeka Iheonu, has taken a studied look at the recently unveiled Amnesty International (AI) Report, saying that it is authentic concerning the killings by the police during the peaceful protests against bad governance.

This is as an activist, Hassan Taiwo-Soweto, has asked the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, to step aside to allow proper and unfettered investigation of forceful treatment, killings, arrests and detention of peaceful protesters during the #EndBadGovernance protest on August 1 – 10, 2024.

Amnesty International, it would be recalled, released its report on the August 1 to 10 #EndBadGovernance nation-

wide peaceful protest, revealing that 24 youths, including children were killed, while 1,200 others were arrested by policemen during the protest.

Barrister Iheonu also maintained that if the report is really true, then it must be an unfortunate situation and the height of impunity by the various levels of government and security agencies in Nigeria.

He stated: "I am not in the position to believe or disbelieve the report, but from past situations in Nigeria, like the #EndSARS protests and the aftermath, Nigerian military and paramilitary agencies, acting on 'orders from above', have infringed on the fundamental human rights of the ordinary and taxpaying Nigerian citizens and residents.

Iheonu stressed that a case in point is the recent manhandling and humiliation of a citizen in Abuja by a Major General and his foot soldier:

The lawyer stated: "Ordinary and struggling Nigerians have been taken for a ride over the years. NBA National executives should be up and doing. Let the rule of law always prevail.

"We have a Latin maxim that translates thus, Let Justice prevail, even if the heavens fall."

Also reacting to the report, an activist, Hassan Taiwo-Soweto, commended Amnesty International for its painstaking investigation into the security high-handedness of peaceful protesters.

Taiwo-Soweto, National Spokesperson, Youth Rights Campaign (YRC), while speaking to Sunday Independent, stressed that the AI report had confirmed what the activists had been saying all along, that several youths were killed, thousands arrested and illegally detained across the country.

He said: "We commend Amnesty International for this re-

port, which confirms what we have been saying since August that the Tinubu regime and its appurtenance of repression, especially the police and the Army committed grave crimes against peaceful protesters during the #Endbadgovernance protest.

"By all standards, this report establishes a prima facie case of usage of excessive force and extra-judicial killings of peaceful protesters against the police and the Army in violation of several national and international statutes guiding the conduct of security agencies during periods of public protests and other civic actions.

"To this extent, we demand that the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, steps aside so that an independent probe can be set up to identify those directly responsible for these crimes and violations so they can be brought to justice."

## Wayas Was Our Icon, Pathfinder, Trailblazer — Ndoma-Egba

Erstwhile Senate Leader, Distinguished Senator Victor Ndoma-Egba (SAN), has paid glowing tribute to the late former Senate President, Dr. Joseph Wayas, describing him as a great leader, who held the position of number-three citizen of the country with dignity and maturity despite his young age at the time.

The late Wayas, a Cross Riverian, born on May 21, 1941, was the Senate President in the Second Republic between 1979 and 1983 during the reign of the late Alhaji Shehu Shagari as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. He died on November 30, 2021 at 80, but his burial was delayed till now.

Ndoma-Egba, in a special tribute to the late Wayas presented at the Night of Tributes for the Second Republic Senate President in Calabar, Cross River State capital, said: "Dr. Wayas was our icon, our pathfinder and our trailblazer.

"He demonstrated our possibilities as Cross Riverians, as people from the South-South geopolitical zone and the Nigerian ethnic minorities in the Nigerian Project.

"He found our space in Nigeria's history and politics, and defined that space."

Wayas was 31 when he became Commissioner for Transport in the old Cross River State

(now Cross River and Akwa Ibom State) and at 38, he was elected President of the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria when Nigeria returned to democracy in 1979, in the Second Republic.

He made history as the first to be re-elected as Senate President when he returned to the Senate in 1983. He acted as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, albeit, for 16 days in 1983 when the then Vice President, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, travelled out of the country, being the first Senate President to so act, making history yet again.

"In spite of his youth, Wayas carried his office with maturity, dignity, style, steeze and panache.

"He was a polyglot, who spoke Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, Ibibio, Tiv, and his native Basang fluently. I was a witness to his proficiency in these languages.

"I am told he spoke many more, including foreign languages. He loved life and lived it to the fullest. He fitted easily with kings as he did with commoners. He had the common touch and spoke the language of every generation.

"Young as he was at the time, he managed a rather complex Second Republic Senate with dexterity. His National Party of Nigeria had 36 of the 95 Senate seats and lacked a majority in the Senate."



Mariam Akande, representative of Delta Airlines (left); Olumide Owolabi, Country Sales Manager, AirFrance-KLM (second left); Yetunde Bankole-Bernard, Group Executive Director, Finchglow Holdings (middle); Edith Sefia, Head of Marketing and Sales, Delta Airlines (second right), and Antonia Umunna, Key Account Manager, Air France-KLM, during the PartnerPlus Connect 11.0 (live edition) held in Abuja, recently.

## Katsina Bows To Pressure, Adopts 70,000 As Minimum Wage

SEGUN OLANIYAN  
KATSINA

Few hours to the commencement of the NLC strike in states yet to adopt the New National Minimum Wage, the Katsina State government, the 34 Local councils and labour unions in the state had agreed on N70,000 as minimum wage for workers in the state.

The agreement was reached

after nine hours of negotiation between the state and local government councils led by the Secretary to the State Government on one hand and the labour union representatives led by the State NLC Chairman.

Reading a communique that was drafted at the end of the meeting on Saturday, Alhaji Abdullahi Garba Faskari, the Secretary to the State Government (SGS), noted that the new minimum wage will

take effect from December, 2024.

He explained that the negotiation meeting also agreed on the consequential adjustment for each Grade Level of the State and Local Government Civil Service which was included in the agreement signed by both parties.

"This landmark decision followed nine hours of intense deliberations between representatives of the state government and labour unions.

"The decision is a testament to the Governor Dikko Umaru Radda administration's dedication to prioritizing the needs of civil servants and fostering harmonious Labour relations," the SSG said.

Faskari said the discussions focused on reconciling workers' demands, the government's financial capacity and ensuring that the minimum wage will be sustainable.

## Zamfara NYSC Resumes Orientation Camp, As Gov. Lawal Pledges Adequate Security

UMAR FARUK MOHAMMED  
GUSAU

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) has resumed its orientation programme for new corps members in Zamfara State.

The swearing-in of graduates deployed to the state for the 2024 Batch C Stream 1 service year was held at the UBEC Training Centre, Gusau, on Friday.

Governor Dauda Lawal, who presided over the ceremony, said

the resumption of the NYSC camping activities marked a significant milestone in the state's journey towards peace and stability.

Lawal, who was represented by the Permanent Secretary, of the state's Ministry of Youth Development, described the NYSC programme as a rallying point for the nation's young graduates to immerse themselves in the cultures and traditions of other parts of the country.

The governor commended

the managers of the scheme for their achievements in the past 51 years, assuring that "as a government, we will continue to partner with the NYSC to ensure that the state derives maximally the benefits of this lofty programme."

While welcoming the corps members to the state, Lawal made it clear that the government would pay full attention to their security and welfare as well as provide all necessary needs during their camping.

In his remarks, the state coordinator, Mallam Muhammed Lawan Ahmed, thanked the Zamfara State government, security agencies, and the NYSC top management for their support to ensure the smooth resumption of the orientation exercise.

He disclosed that a sizable number of corps members were deployed to the state for the current service year.

The Coordinator, who highlighted the essence of the orientation, stated that the corps members would be exposed to various lectures, drills, skills acquisition as well as citizenship and leadership programmes.

## Tyler Fray Foundation Launches Music Scholarship In Partnership With Ten Strings Music School



Tyler Fray Foundation, in collaboration with Ten Strings Music School, has announced an empowering music scholarship for young Nigerian talents in the music industry.

This initiative aims to support aspiring musicians in pursuing their dreams and building careers in the music industry.

The foundation was inspired by the life of Olorunfola Oluwadamilola Falode, popularly known as Tyler Fray, a talented music artiste and producer.

Tyler tragically passed away on February 15, 2014, at the age of 19, after falling from the 17th floor of a high-rise building in Dubai, where he was studying to become a music professional.

The circumstances surrounding his fall from the balcony of his 17th floor apartment, where he was with two other individuals, are still unclear till date.

Tyler's passion for music and commitment to his craft continues to inspire the foundation's mission to nurture the next generation of Nigerian music creatives.

He was the son of Aisha Falode, ace sports broadcaster, former Chairperson of Nigerian Women Football League, and Executive Committee member of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) who is also a member of the foundation's Board of Trustees.

Other members of the board include Jadesola Falode, Mike Itemuagbor, Genny Adeosun, Bashorun Dele Momodu, and Ehi Braimah.

The scholarship is open to aspiring musicians who meet the following requirements: Must be a Nigerian resident; Aged between 16 and 25 years; Demonstrates a strong passion for pursuing a music career; Shows a clear financial need for the scholarship; Commits to completing the scholarship programme.

Applicants are required to complete the online application form at [www.tylerfrayfoundation.org/scholarship](http://www.tylerfrayfoundation.org/scholarship) and submit video and audio files showcasing their musical talents by 4th December 2024.

# Our View

## VISION

To be Nigeria's First Truly Independent National Quality Newspaper

## OUR MISSION

To produce a quality, vibrant and viable newspaper that will inform and form the nation's present and aspiring political, business, economic and cultural leadership; challenge and inspire the nation's journalists to advance and defend the public good; and deliver superior value to all stakeholders.

## EDITORIAL POLICY

We shall be independent on all matters, but shall never be neutral on any matter, especially those concerning the well-being of Nigerians.

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## Russia-Ukraine War: Time For A Truce

**A**fter months of tensions and arms build-up along its borders, Russia finally invaded Ukraine on 24th February, 2022. Airstrikes and missiles bombarded Ukrainian cities, followed by ground invasion from the Russian and Belarusian territories.

The invasion, the first of such in the 21st century, provoked anger and condemnation across the globe, especially in Europe and North America. At the emergency session of the United Nations on 2nd March, 2022, 141 out of the 193 member nations voted in favour of the resolution condemning Russia, 35 abstained while five voted against it. The United Nations "deplores in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine". It demanded Russia "immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine" and "completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces".

At the beginning of the tensions in 2014, Russia had annexed Crimea while the separatists it backed seized part of the Donbas region, sparking a war between Ukrainian armed forces and the Russian-backed separatists.

The on-going war has led to

catastrophic deaths and destruction in Ukraine and resulted in the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The conflict has led to food and energy crises with attendant rise in cost of living all over the world.

There is the strong view, especially among the Western states, that an authoritarian state like Russia harbours mortal fear for the democracy wind blowing across its borders with the potential of rocking the political boat within its territory. The plausible cause of the invasion would seem to prevent Ukraine from joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Russia had for years railed against the expansion of the Western military alliance to Eastern Europe and stationing of its weapons close to its borders. In the months before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia specifically demanded that NATO revert to its 1997 borders in Europe, remove its military infrastructure from the Central Europe and the Baltic as well as guarantee that Ukraine would never be admitted into the organisation. The US-led NATO largely rejected the demands, restating its open-door policy. It noted that Ukraine would not in the immediate future be

admitted into the alliance.

However, two years after the invasion, the war has raged on ferociously, with western nations supplying Ukraine with high-grade weapons. While we recognise the rights of every sovereign nation to belong to any association of its choosing, the security concerns of Moscow should not be completely ignored. The recent admission of Finland and Sweden into NATO, especially the former, which shares a massive border with Russia, may further escalate military tensions with potential for debilitating consequences across Europe and the world.

After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and dissolution of the rival Warsaw Pact, the continued existence of NATO and its assimilation of former members of the Soviet Union would naturally alarm Russia and raise eyebrows about the real motives of the US-led NATO. For instance, why is NATO expanding only to the borders of Russia? Why is the military alliance only interested in membership of countries bordering Russia? Why does NATO still exist as a military alliance after the end the Cold War? Can NATO explain away

the charge that it is using the Russia-Ukraine war to test the efficacy of its high-tech weapons, just like Russia would also stand accused? Why does the alliance insist Ukraine must win the war rather than negotiate an immediate ceasefire and ultimate settlement of the avoidable conflict?

Nevertheless, we reject the invasion of an independent entity by another sovereign country, especially without the sanction of the United Nations. Countries must respect the territorial integrity of one another. Russia must stop the war and pull its forces out of Ukraine immediately. It must jettison the sham referenda and the consequent absorption of the four regions of eastern Ukraine – Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia - into Russian territory. NATO must end with deliberate speed its supply of weapons to Ukraine and kick-start the process of dismantling the military association.

We call on Ukraine to implement the Minsk agreements, as a way out of the political logjam in the Donbas region. All parties to the conflict - Russia, Ukraine and US-led NATO - must seek diplomatic solution to all the contentious issues without further ado.

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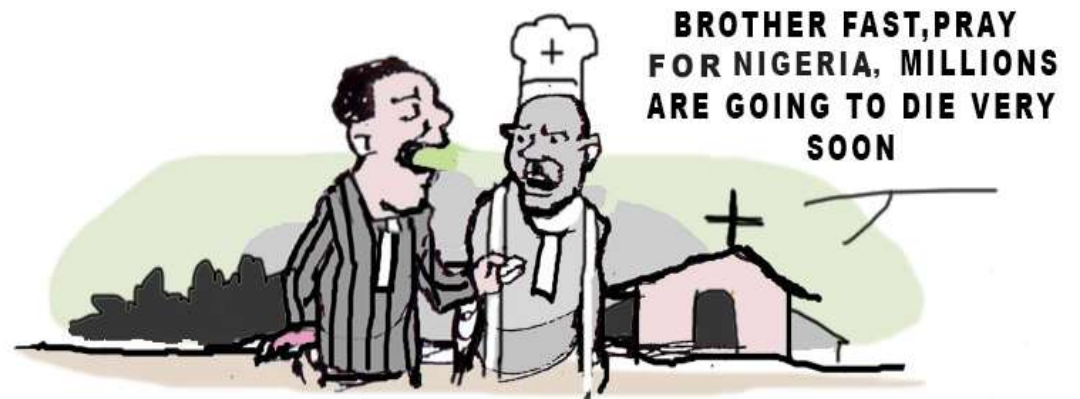
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THAT IS NOT A PROPHECY. WHEN YOU KILL ALL THE FARMERS, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?



# Your Views

Articles should be a maximum of 750 words and sent to: [opinion@independentng.com](mailto:opinion@independentng.com) and [densityshow@yahoo.com](mailto:densityshow@yahoo.com)

## Preventing Our Children From A Perilous Future

### DRUM BEATS

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"Let us work together to create a future where every child can learn, grow and thrive. Education is a right not a privilege. Let us make it a reality for all." - Hon. Obidike Chukwuebuka (APC Chieftain)

The celebration of the 2024 World Children's Day has come and gone but the scandalous statistics of the abysmal quality of the life of the average Nigerian youth stare us all in the face. Lest we deceive ourselves, there is cause for serious concern, with regards to the educational, healthcare and socio-economic status of our children, that we, as adults would be leaving for them.

For instance, according to the Chief of Field Office of UNICEF in Bauchi state, Dr. Tushar Rane, Nigeria currently holds the ignoble record of being home to the largest number of out of school children. It is so alarming that 63% of primary school children regularly attend school. In fact, the number of school-age children out-of-school has escalated from 10.5 million as at Year 2020 to an alarming figure of 20 million in October, 2022. That is according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO). But that is not all there is to the low level of commitment to education of our younger generation.

According to the World Bank, Nigeria's persisting learning poverty is so

worrisome that about 70 % of the 10-year olds cannot understand simple sentence in the English language, or perform basic numeracy tasks! Yet, there is more to stir the conscience of patriotic Nigerians.

Considering the parlous performance of the successive political leaders in the critical health sector, as at February 2024, some 35 million under-5 Nigerian children were considered as voiceless victims of malnutrition; unable to access different types of food items that are nutritious, safe and adequate to guarantee their wellbeing. That frightening figure is credited to dataphyte.com.

Similarly, 12 million of them suffer from stunted growth, even as 3 million agonize over wasting, which is the excessive and rapid weight loss. The average reduction in this excruciating health challenge is a meagre 1.4 % in a year. Also, 23.5% of our children are said be anaemic. And UNICEF has gone further to reveal that 6,800 children in the embattled North-East geo-political axis have been serially abused over the decades. This is unacceptable in a country considered as an "African Giant".

But the data available on those young Nigerians who might be healthy but are barely living from hand -to-mouth due to unemployment are simply heart-rending.

Going by the data made public by Spectator Index, FIJ NG, 53% of Nigerian youth between the ages of 15 and 24 fall under the bracket of unemployment, as at April 2023. Mind you, that is the second worst in the whole wide world, with South Africa ranked the worst at 61%. While Greece scored 23%, Japan's figure remained as low as 5.2% on youth unemployment. That should serve as a worthy inspiration for a country such as Nigeria. So, how do we change the narrative, to ensure a brighter future

for Nigerian youth?

Going forward, we have to learn from the past experiences, policies and programs of some concerned and committed individuals, communities and countries. It would be recalled that a patriot, and an Efik-born Nigerian by the name of Professor Eyo Ita (of blessed memory) returned from the United States to the country in 1933 to form the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1934. That was after the educationist had acquired two masters degrees and a doctorate degree in the field of philosophy.

The matching mandate of the NYM was predicated on the palm philosophy with the five fingers of Health, Education, Beauty, Knowledge, Patriotism and Religion. Soon after coming into being it saw to the training of the junior cadre of doctors, engineers and teachers in the country. In fact, it became so impactful that in March of 1934 it influenced the formation of the Lagos Youth Movement that was launched and piloted by the likes of Dr. J. C. Vaughan as the president, with members such as Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and H.O. Davies. Its influence was one of the factors that lured Dr. Nnamidi Azikiwe from Ghana and before you know it, the NYM became a nationwide movement. That underscores the power of a brilliant idea that was acted upon as a team work.

The questions that the persisting, poor quality of education and healthcare delivery bring to the table include the level of priority our past and present leaders offer the all-important sector of educational development. If Chief Obafemi Awolowo could adhere strictly to the 26% UNESCO-recommended allocation of the budget of the then Western Region to education why has it become so difficult for other state governors and presidents to do same, over the decades? Is it rocket science? Not at all.

On the interventions by governments,

it is on record that in January 2021 the then President Muhammad Buhari inaugurated an 18-man Presidential Steering Committee on Alternate School Program (ASP) to address the challenge of the high figure of out of school children. It was headed by the Minister of Education under his administration, Adamu Adamu. Also included was the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, Sadiya Umar Farouq. But did the ASP achieve its primary objectives? The answer is patently obvious to discerning minds.

As being canvassed by Chukwuebuka, a holistic approach is required to drive the vision of a fruitful future for our largely neglected, ignorant and impoverished youth. Much as it is commendable that a state governor such as Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos state has increased the budgetary allocation for education to 18 % and taken 12,000 out of school children back to the halls of knowledge acquisition, the government cannot do it all alone.

Good as it is, that both Governors Babagana Zulum of Bornu state and Dr. Alex Otti of Abia state are providing solid infrastructure for education delivery, all hands must be on deck. Parents should inculcate high moral values in their children. Also, religious, traditional institutions and non-governmental organizations must rise up with collaborative efforts to stem the raging tides of mass youth illiteracy. Doing so will certainly reduce the attendant disasters of drug abuse, insecurity such as terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and armed robbery.

And of course, the government should fulfill the mandate of Section 14 (2) (b) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) by ensuring sustainable security and providing for the citizens' welfare. Doing so will guarantee a brighter future for our children.

## Measuring National Progress, NBS Data And Scepticism

### BAYO ONANUGA

Recent reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) have become a focal point of criticism and scepticism, especially by the political opposition and perpetual doubters of any positive report about our country.

In its Q2 labour survey report, the NBS says the unemployment rate fell from 5.3 % in Q1 to 4.3% in Q2. Compared to the unemployment rate of 5.3% in Q4 2022, the report shows some progress, as it also indicates lower level of youth unemployment.

The NBS also reported that GDP growth in the third quarter rose to 3.46% year-on-year in real terms, higher than the 2.54% recorded in Q3 2023 and above the second quarter growth of 3.19%.

The report stated that the GDP's performance in the third quarter of 2024 was driven mainly by the services sector, which recorded a growth of 5.19% and contributed 53.58% to the aggregate GDP. The agriculture sector grew by 1.14%, from the growth of 1.30% recorded in the third quarter of 2023. The industry sector's growth was 2.18%, an improvement from 0.46% recorded in the third quarter of 2023.

"In terms of share of the GDP, the services sector contributed more to the aggregate GDP in the third quarter of 2024 compared to the corresponding quarter of 2023.

"In the quarter under review, aggregate GDP at basic price stood at N71,131,091.07 million in nominal terms. This performance is higher than the third quarter of 2023, which recorded an aggregate GDP of

N60,658,600.37 million, indicating a year-on-year nominal growth of 17.26%.

Amid a singer's uninformed opinion that went viral on social media that our country's economy is in shambles, the NBS sounded positive, reporting that the economy is improving, as proven by the successive growth from Quarter 1 of 2024 up until Quarter 3.

Ordinarily, such positive reports should elicit hope and joy that our country's economy is getting out of the woods, but they were instead met with skepticism from

**While challenges remain, dismissing progress in a knee-jerk manner, as some Nigerians do, negates the hard work of the government and the private sector, which contributed to these achievements**

some quarters.

Unfounded allegations by critics that the data was manipulated fail to recognise the transparent and robust methodologies employed by the NBS. These methodologies are continually reviewed and improved to ensure reliability, providing a solid foundation for the data presented.

In contrast, when the NBS reported that inflation figures rose, these same voices quickly endorsed the report, illustrating some Nigerians' selective acceptance of data based on preconceived narratives and confirmation bias rather than its authenticity.

It is crucial to emphasise that the NBS operates as an independent entity committed to providing accurate and objective data. These statistics are not mere numbers; they are derived from comprehensive research and analysis, reflecting the multifaceted realities of our national economy. The processes align with global best practices, and the bureau's methodologies are continually reviewed and improved to ensure reliability.

Moreover, the positive economic indicators should be viewed as milestones in the ongoing efforts by the Tinubu administration to strengthen Nigeria's economy. The figures by NBS reflect that a combination of government initiatives is yielding fruits, boosting the service sector and the stock and bond market, creating jobs, and driving sustainable growth. These developments, sooner than later, will translate into improved living standards, increased job opportunities, and a more robust economy for all Nigerians.

While challenges remain, dismissing progress in a knee-jerk manner, as some

Nigerians do, negates the hard work of the government and the private sector, which contributed to these achievements.

The same way some Nigerians dismiss and deride economic data is very prevalent on the judicial front and in the work of the Independent National Electoral Commission. When a politician wins an election or a legal case, the singsong is that it has been a fair contest and justice has been delivered; however, when a candidate or party loses, the supporters binge on derision against INEC or the judges. Only recently, a prominent Nigerian went abroad to dismiss the 2023 election as a travesty because his candidate did not win the poll or the legal challenge instituted.

As Nigerians, we must respect our judicial system, even when the outcome does not favour us. The symbol of justice is a pendulum, and judges uphold justice based on the rule of law, without public pressure or sentiment. Accusations of corruption, whenever verdicts defy personal expectations, undermine the integrity of our courts and the democratic principles we cherish. We must turn the page over these matters and stop clinging to scepticism when presented with favourable data reflecting our nation's progress. Those who truly want Nigeria to become a great country we all claim we seek will not use every opportunity to take out the flames of national progress. While the challenges remain and are being addressed, we must always recognise and celebrate every progress.

*Onanuga is Special Adviser to President Tinubu on Information and Strategy*

# Anxiety Over Bishop T.D. Jakes State Of Health

EJIKEME OMENAZU

**R**enowned pastor, author, and founder of The Potter's House megachurch, Bishop T.D. Jakes experienced a health emergency shortly after delivering a powerful sermon last Sunday.

His situation sent anxiety, shock and shivers across the world as his followers and fans prayed.

Thomas Dexter Jakes (born June 9, 1957) is an American non-denominational Christian pastor and motivational speaker; commands huge followership in Nigeria and Africa.

According to agency reports, the incident occurred following an extended sermon at the Dallas-based non-denominational church.

In a statement posted on Facebook, church officials confirmed that Bishop Jakes received immediate medical attention and was in stable condition under healthcare professionals.

The statement reads, "During today's service, Bishop T.D. Jakes experienced a slight health incident and received immediate medical attention following his powerful hour-long message."

"Bishop Jakes is stable and under the care of medical professionals. The entire Potter's House family is grateful for the outpouring of love, prayers, and support from the community. Thank you for your understanding and continued prayers."

Founded in 1996, The Potter's House is one of the largest multicultural megachurches in the United States, boasting over 30,000 members.

The church, well known for its global influence, has consistently been ranked among the most impactful religious institutions in the country.

## His Reaction

Meanwhile, Bishop T.D. Jakes himself has given an update on health, saying he did not suffer a stroke as widely reported.

This is as prayers have been pouring in after a North Texas church pastor suffered a health scare during last Sunday service.

## The Brief

T.D. Jakes shared an update on his health on Wednesday afternoon as he appeared to be leaving a medical facility.

The 67-year-old Dallas preacher said he did not suffer a stroke, but the medical emergency still could have been fatal "if it weren't for God's intervention."

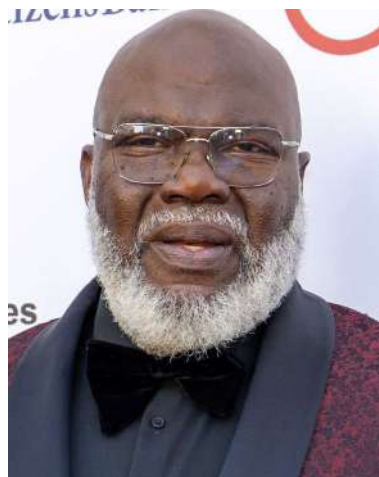
Bishop T.D. Jakes, who was heading home from the hospital, thanked everyone who prayed for his recovery. He even shared a video and written message on social media on Wednesday afternoon.

"I'm so grateful to y'all," he said, pointing to his nurses as he appeared to be leaving a medical facility.

"Grateful to all the people who prayed and all the people who texted, all the people who had prayer vigils, all the people who were concerned and sent love and sent notes. I'm just grateful.

This past Sunday, the 67-year-old

## ● Suffers Health Emergency After Sunday Sermon



T.D. Jakes

Dallas preacher was rushed offstage while delivering a sermon at The Potter's House of Dallas. Video from the church's stream posted on social media showed Jakes lowering his microphone while starting to shake.

During Sunday service on November 24, 2024, Bishop T.D. Jakes suffered an apparent medical emergency at the end of a service, during a prayer.

Jakes clarified that he did not have a stroke. But he said the medical emergency "could've been fatal if it weren't for God's intervention."

"A special thank you to God and the medical professionals in our city whose speed and expertise were beyond exceptional," he wrote in his post.

He said he would take some time to recuperate and reflect on what happened.

## Family Speaks

The family of Bishop T.D. Jakes shared an update after Jakes had a "slight health incident" during his Sunday sermon.

According to the church's website, Jakes had advised three presidents and was a featured speaker at the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2009.

Since then, The Potter's House of Dallas released a statement saying, "Bishop T.D. Jakes experienced a slight health incident and received immediate medical attention following his powerful hour-long message. Bishop Jakes is stable and under the care of medical professionals. The entire Potter's House family is grateful for the outpouring of love, prayers, and support from the community."

The church did not share any specifics about what might have led to the health incident.

On Sunday night, Jakes' daughter, Sarah Jakes Roberts, and her husband, Touré Roberts, gave an update on Jakes' status. They say he was already beginning to improve.

"Today could have been a tragic day, but it wasn't by the mercy of God, by the grace of God. Bishop is doing well, he's recovering well. He's getting medical care," said Roberts, Bishop Jakes' son-in-law.

Roberts said with a laugh that the family is working to try to get Jakes to sit down. The family says the prayers are being felt.

"People are asking, 'what can we do?' Keep praying. Keep encouraging. It means a lot to our family," Roberts said.

Roberts says the incident is a reminder to show your love for those close to you.

## I'm Not Afraid To Die, Says Jakes

Bishop Jakes has reassured his followers of his resilience and faith following a recent health emergency that occurred during Sunday services at The Potter's House in Dallas.

In an emotional video shared on Wednesday evening, the renowned pastor, seated in a wheelchair in what appeared to be a hospital setting, expressed deep gratitude to his medical team and supporters.

He clarified that while his condition was serious, it was not a stroke, and credited divine intervention for sparing his life.

"I'm so grateful. So grateful to y'all," Bishop Jakes said, addressing medical staff in the video. "All the people who prayed. All the people who texted. All the people who had prayer vigils. All the people who were concerned and sent love and notes. Just grateful. Thank you."

The 67-year-old pastor recounted the incident, which happened while he was delivering a sermon. Witnesses said he suddenly sat down and began trembling, prompting church members to gather around him as the live broadcast of the service was cut.

In his video message, Bishop Jakes addressed his readiness for life's uncertainties.

"I'm not afraid to die," he declared. "I don't want to hurt my kids and the people who love me, my church that needs me, the world who called me, and the God who sent me. Sometimes you just got to be grateful."

He shared that his focus now is on resting and reflecting. "My job is to recuperate and reflect on God's protection. I owe it to my amazing family and church members to rest and ruminate as He restores me towards His service," he posted on Instagram.

The church has not announced when Bishop Jakes will return to the pulpit, but his message of faith and gratitude continues to resonate with his global audience.

## The Potter's House Church

Jakes, 67, founded The Potter's House Church in Dallas in 1996.

The Potter's House website says the non-denominational church now has more than 30,000 members.

Every week, thousands tune in to the church's Sunday service.

According to the church's website, Jakes has advised three presidents and was a featured speaker at the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2009.

## Visionary Leader

"Where there is no vision, the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Proverbs 29:18

Bishop T.D. Jakes, one of the world's most revered masterminds, leverages his pioneering vision and instinct to serve others in areas extending beyond the church.

In order to help lead people to their destiny, you have to meet people where they are in life. It is with this earnest approach that Bishop Jakes has been able to reach millions of people from all socioeconomic backgrounds, races, nationalities, and creeds.

Digital media, film, and television, among others, have been instrumental in helping Bishop Jakes meet the disparate needs of countless individuals.

In September 2016, T.D. Jakes launched the TD Jakes Show, an intellectually invigorating, yet practical daytime talk show, where Bishop helps his guests lead empowering lives through candid conversation. As a visionary leader, T.D. Jakes encourages you to think differently – and progressively – so that you can create a more meaningful life experience that is truly your own.

The adage, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" is the bedrock of Bishop's visionary leadership.

## Faithful Pastor

For more than 40 years, Bishop T.D. Jakes has helped millions of people realise their purpose through his dynamic ministry. Recognised as "America's Best Preacher" by Time Magazine, as well as "One of the Nation's Most Influential & Mesmerising Preachers" by The New York Times, Bishop Jakes remains a charismatic, yet humble man. In 1996, with minimal resources, T.D. Jakes founded The Potter's House (TPH), a non-denominational, multicultural church and global humanitarian organisation, in Dallas, Texas. The church has since expanded to include more than 30,000 members, with more than 50 diverse ministries.

While TPH, located in southern Dallas, is the designated home to numerous members, Bishop Jakes has fulfilled the needs of those residing in the northern and western regions of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, as well as out-of-state. TPH campuses are also present in Frisco and Fort Worth, Texas, as well as Denver, Colorado.

Bishop Jakes faithfully serves his local and global communities to embolden those who are marginalized, from Dallas, Texas to South Africa to Sydney, Australia. "The Potter's House charter is to extend a hand of help to the needy, a heart of compassion to the hurting, and a message of empowerment to the disenfranchised."

To this end, Bishop Jakes provides a welcoming church environment to all. Unequivocally, the diversity displayed throughout TPH is what makes it a tru-

ly progressive church, serving people of every socioeconomic status, age, nationality, and race.

Each year Bishop Jakes helps underserved communities through TPH ministries, including homeless outreach, GED/literacy programs, and AIDS outreach. Bishop Jakes also empowers communities through distinct national ministries, including Global Partner System (GPS), MegaCARE, and Texas Offenders Reentry Initiative (T.O.R.I.). With a steadfast love of people, TPH is consistently ranked amongst the nation's most influential churches each year.

## Charismatic Influencer

"Others can inspire you, but ultimately the only thing that empowers you is what lies within you and learning how to better utilize what you've been given." – T.D. Jakes, *Instinct: The Power to Unleash Your Inborn Drive*

A proclivity to disrupt the status quo, Bishop T.D. Jakes is one of the most coveted faith-based influencers in business, education, film, and entertainment. T.D. has advised the last three presidents; in 2009, he was a featured speaker at the inauguration of Barack Obama; and in 2011, he gave remarks at a White House Easter Prayer Breakfast.

From Savoy Magazine recognising Bishop Jakes as one of the "Top 100 Powers That Be" to Ebony Magazine honouring him on their "Power 100 List," Bishop Jakes continues to show the world how to lead with purpose. While T.D. Jakes possesses myriad leadership qualities, his ability to leverage his linguistic prowess, strategic insights, and servant spirit is unparalleled. Some of the most successful business executives and leaders travel from all over the world seeking Bishop's counsel. T.D. Jakes has offered his insights at diverse forums, including The Aspen Institute, The Willow Creek Leadership Forum, and The SMU Tate Lecture Series, among others. His efforts have helped some of the world's most illustrious leaders elevate their brands to the next level.

Bishop Jakes also connects communities from across the globe through various multicultural conferences. For more than a decade, MegaFest continues to receive international recognition as the nation's largest faith and family festival.

This phenomenal conference draws upwards of 100,000 attendees from as far as Singapore, China. From Woman Thou Art Loosed, ManPower, MegaKidz, to Fire Code Youth, this conference will entertain and educate the entire family.

Additionally, Bishop Jakes offers entrepreneurs, pastors, and leaders an opportunity to hone their leadership skills through the International Pastors and Leadership Conference.

Bishop Jakes encourages you to attend these transformative conferences and events, as the wealth of knowledge that he offers his audiences is invaluable.

(Additional report from Bishop Jakes and his church's websites)

## Believing

# Pastors Must Ensure That Young Men, Women Have Encounter With God – Pastor Emmanuel

**Could you tell us about your background? Did you ever imagine that you would end up preaching the gospel?**

Yes and No. It wasn't what I wanted to do. Though I was born into an Anglican priest's family, my sister and I used to play with those liturgical programmes as kids. We'll conduct imaginary naming ceremonies and other things we saw our dad do. But that's just all about it. I was thinking more about being a soldier at first; that should be due to seeing soldiers when we were young; during the Civil War, an Army barracks wasn't too far from where we lived, so they'd walk past in their uniform, I used to admire them a lot. My dad bought me a toy soldier drum. Growing up, I thought of many things I'd love to be: a medical doctor, a businessman, a livestock farmer, etc. Those pushed me towards the sciences even though I did better in geography, commerce, and history. I got the prizes for the best student in the last two in my Form 3, but I didn't go to the Arts or the Commercial departments but to science. After pursuing admissions to read Medicine for about three years, I opted for Animal Science. Preaching wasn't part of the plan. But, towards the end of secondary school, I was born again, and I sensed that God had given me the grace to understand scriptures and to be able to communicate things I never knew anything about before. Even then, I didn't think it was something to pursue full-time until later.

**What was your childhood like? Could you tell us about your family, upbringing, parents and education?**

As my father was an Anglican priest, I grew up in the Vicarage until I was 10 when he passed on. My mother raised me from then on. I attended St Paul's CMS Primary School in Omu Aran, Kwara State of Nigeria. Afterwards, I went to Titcombe College, Egbe, when it was still in Kwara State, now in Kogi State. I spent two years there before changing schools to Aisegba Community Grammar School. Went to A' Level School at the Federal School of Arts and Science, Suleja, Niger State. From there I proceeded to read Agriculture (Animal Science) at the University of Ibadan, graduating in 1994.

**Could you compare your parenting with that of your parents and the parenting we see today?**

So many people are disappointed with current children and how parents raise them. I had a very tough experience because I lost my father when I was just nine. My mum did her best to raise us to desire to know God, continuing where my husband stopped. She was a teacher, and she didn't have a lot of money. So, financially, it was tough, but we had three meals daily, which, looking back now, was fantastic. All they did didn't stop me from being rough as a young boy. But, it prepared me to give Christ a thought when I had to make the decision for which I'm eternally grateful. I think it could be easier for my children because they grew up in a more close-knit

Pastor Evans Adetokunbo Emmanuel is the Seaman of Grace Missions International, a teaching and Christian ministry development consultancy that helps ministers and ministries make eternal impacts through grace. In this interview he granted **BOLA ADEWARA** on behalf of Sunday Independent, he looks at the Christian ministry, the church, pastors and sermons from churches, the youth ministry and the rarity of Bible study sessions in many Churches today. Read on:



Emmanuel

system. They got to know God from the start, and even though they had to pass through their challenges, they understood what it is to walk in faith and to trust and obey God. We didn't have the distractions of television and social media in our days, and so it helped our focus. Today, a young person can key his or her relationship with God into social media, but it might be difficult, and that's where parenting with that in focus is key in today's Christian parenting. Children's rights weren't so much an issue back then, unlike now when children have become so assertive and can question their parent's choices and decisions. It calls for parents to know more about life and what they are doing. Now, we must be sure we are being more exemplary than just being authoritative or authoritarian. When they see goodness in their parents, they don't mind copying, but they will react

negatively to double standards.

**How did your movements through secondary school and university dovetail into having a ministry? Who would you regard as your fathers in the Lord and mentors? Who were the people you saw those days that inspired you?**

I was born again in my final year of secondary school. We used to call it Form 5 then. My faith was sad in those early years. By the time I was in A' level school, God was already seriously tugging at my heart. I had worked briefly at the Ajaokuta Steel Complex before going to A' level school. There, I met some wonderful Christian folks who showed me some basic things I was missing, especially about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. When I received the baptism, it wasn't just the speaking in tongues which actually came later, but the fire. It ignited so much zeal and love for God in me, which still drives me till to-

day. So, when I got to a level school, I gravitated towards young people like me who were also having similar experiences. I began sharing the scriptures with people because I saw things that amazed me from the scriptures. We had a wonderful time in fellowship and in the Spirit of God. I started public preaching there in school. Our leader heard me share some scriptures, and he felt the whole fellowship must hear. That was it. I was also a member of the Anglican Youth Fellowship at home at St Paul's Omu Aran. They also gave me the opportunity to share in our fellowship and Bible Study meetings. One day, God told me at home to prepare that I was going to preach at the English service that Sunday morning. Ordinarily, we usually invited senior friends to come minister to us on Sunday mornings. But God told me to prepare, and He gave me what to preach. I prepared and went to church and sat down. Back in the day, we got to church before the service and sat quietly. While seating, the sister who used to coordinate came to me and said Brother Tokunbo, you'll be preaching this morning. I was shocked to see how God had planned things. I preached to God's glorious name. That was my first public preaching outside of the school fellowship system. It was 1988...that was the day God brought me out to preach among adults and in a public service outside of school fellowships. I got to the university that same year with a mandate to go preach and teach. I got to school before resuming, and I was allocated a room in Kuti Hall Wooden Blocks, UI. One of those days, I was sitting quietly in my

room when two brothers came in. They started to share God's word with me, and we started discussing scriptures. Suddenly, they exclaimed, "You are the person. You are that person." I asked what happened? They said they were outgoing officials of the Prelim Science Students Fellowship and that they've been praying to ask God to show them the person He had chosen to lead the fellowship next. They said God told them the person was in Kuti Hall Wooden Blocks and that they should go there, that He would lead them to the person. That was how a great ministry experience began for me in UI...all to God's glory.

**Could you tell us about the Nigerian youth and the nascent culture of sagging, hairstyles, nose-rings, ear-rings, mini or micro skirts, exposure of breasts, nakedness, etc. Would you say these youth are serious? Are they capable of directing the future of Nigeria, more particularly, the Church?**

Every generation will always have such things. We, too, had haircuts, dress codes, etc., that made us think we were enjoying life. According to the scriptures, these things are all about youthful lusts, which the young man and woman must flee. But, we must not mix them up with things that may not be out of place naturally, but are preached against on a mere religious basis without having any spiritual implications. It's a dicey thing, really; we have seen young people who kept the religious codes of dressing and public manners without having any spiritual substance within so that when they face real temptations, they have nothing to withstand. We must ensure that the young man and woman have a genuine encounter with God in being born again and know Jesus Christ as his or her Lord, who must be obeyed, revered, believed, and served with everything they have. When this conviction is deep-seated in them beyond mere church attendance, we'll have wonderful people who are anointed to do great things. The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life must be fought in three children so that they know what God hates from what God loves and choose what He loves. Today, young people are being focused on money without God. They aren't being taught that God gives and owns everything they can get, and that's a hazardous thing we must deal with in these young people. We must be careful not to let them think they can become anything outside of God's works in their lives. A spate of criticisms is rushing at the current Pastors, especially the Pentecostals. Issues of tithes, salvation, prosperity, ostentatious living, etc., are topical on social media.

**We must ensure that the young man and woman have a genuine encounter with God in being born again and know Jesus Christ as his or her Lord, who must be obeyed, revered, believed, and served with everything they have**

# Believing



L-r: Dr. Victor Bashola, Awardees Selection Coordinator, Miss Seun Oyedeji, Awards Coordinator, Gbenga Olubiyi-Sodeke, Project Coordinator & Host, Ms Dele Agadumo, Programme Coordinator, and Timon Oviawe, Artistes Coordinator, at the Abundant Life Meritorious Gospel Award 2024 held at Celebration Gardens International, Ikeja.



L-r: Pastor Yomi Adesanya, Pastor Abu Daniel, Apostle Gabriel Israel, Apostle James Olukayode, Chairman, PFN Apata/Onipanu Zone, Pastor Isy Khobys, Guest Speaker, Pastor Moses Adewole, Pastor Joseph Nwandu, Pastor Bola Okunade, & a guest during the annual Thanksgiving service of PFN Apata Onipanu Zone held at Holy Ghost Supernatural Movement Ministries, Shomolu, Lagos

## RCCG's Heart Of Love Foundation Boosts 5,000 Elderly, Marks 12 Years Anniversary

NGOZI UMA

The Heart of Love Foundation, an initiative by Pastor Mrs. Folu Adeboye, wife of Pastor E.A. Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), celebrated its 12th anniversary on Thursday, November 21, 2024, in Alexandra, South Africa.

The foundation, driven by a mission to care for elderly people, has transformed the lives of over 5,000 elderly individuals through spiritual support, food aid, and empowerment programmes.

Speaking at the programme held in South Africa, Pastor Mrs. Folu Adeboye shared her inspiration for starting the foundation in 2011.

She recalled a visit to the Nigerian Consulate in Johannesburg, South Africa, where Hon. Okey Emuchay, the Consul General at the time, informed her of the alarming death rate among the elderly in Alexandra.

Deeply moved, she sought divine guidance and reached out to Pastor Tunde Obokhai, who became a key partner in the mission.

Pastor Mrs. Folu Adeboye said: "For over a decade, Heart of Love has selflessly served the elderly community in Alexandra, South Africa, extending the love of Christ to over 1,000 'go-go's' (elderly women) and 'madala's' (elderly men) through monthly prayer meetings and grocery support.

"From the very beginning, I knew this was a rescue mission ordained by God.

"We started small, working with a few elderly people in Alexandra, but God has been faithful.



RCCG's Heart of Love...Pastor Adeboye and his wife, Pastor Mrs. Folu Adeboye, flanked by some of the church's ministers and the elderly during the programme

Over the years, the foundation has grown, touching lives both physically and spiritually."

Pastor Tunde Obokhai, the Co-ordinator of the Heart of Love Foundation, highlighted the foundation's achievements.

"We began with just five elderly individuals, offering prayers and basic support. Today, through the vision and support of Pastor Mrs. Adeboye, we have empowered over 5,000 elderly people.

"They have not only received material aid such as groceries, clothing, and winter supplies but have also grown spiritually through Bible studies and gained new skills to help them become financially independent."

He continued: "Prior to then my wife, Pastor Matilda, has been involved in helping abused women initiative in Alexandra.

"To kick start the Heart Of Love Foundation, we were introduced to a place where some group of old women meet somewhere in Alex which could be a platform for us to take up this initiative.

"We started with five people,

it extended to 10 people, then we grew from there gradually to 200 women and since then we have been growing till when the idea came for us to start a parish.

"We took it from that level and started a parish named Jesus Ambassador."

According to him, the foundation operates primarily in Alexandra, South Africa, and nearby RCCG parishes.

He added: "It provides a range of services, including monthly prayer meetings, skills training, and emotional and spiritual support for elderly women ('go-go's') and men ('madala's').

"These initiatives have helped many elderly individuals regain a sense of purpose and overcome challenges like illness and isolation.

Pastor Obokhai noted that the foundation's impact has extended beyond just material assistance.

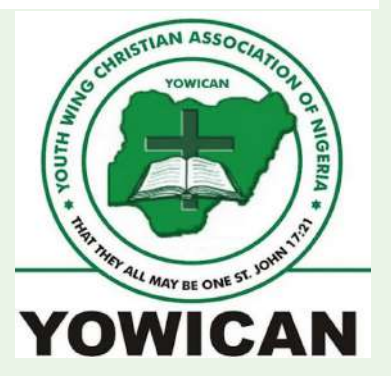
"This mission is about showing the love of Christ in action. Through compassion and dignity, we have built a stronger community, one life at a time."

## Adze: A Leader, Mentor, Friend To Many Young Nigerians – Archbishop Okoh

Being a condolence message by Archbishop Daniel Okoh, President, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on the death of Dr. Monday Bitrus Adze, Chairman, Youth Wing of the organisation, YOWICAN



Okoh



YOWICAN

On behalf of the national leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), I wish to express our heartfelt condolences on the untimely passing of Dr. Monday Bitrus Adze, the esteemed Chairman of the Youth Wing of YOWICAN.

His sudden departure has left a profound void within our communities, particularly among the youth he so passionately served.

Dr. Adze was not only a dedicated veterinarian, but also a beacon of hope and inspiration. His unwavering commitment to empowering young people and fostering unity within the Christian community was a reflection of his faith and vision for a brighter future.

Throughout his tenure, Dr. Adze tirelessly worked to uplift the youth, encouraging them to embrace their roles as leaders and advocates for positive change.

His initiatives and programmes touched countless lives, instilling a sense of purpose and direction among the

youth of CAN.

The shock of his unexpected passing leaves us grappling with the loss of a leader who was both a mentor and a friend to many young Nigerians.

The impact of his contributions to the Youth Wing and the broader community cannot be overstated.

As we mourn this significant loss, I encourage all members of CAN, especially the youth, to come together in solidarity and support for one another and for Dr. Adze's family during this difficult time.

Let us honour his legacy by continuing the work he so passionately championed.

On behalf of the Christian Association of Nigeria, I extend my deepest sympathies to the family of Dr. Monday Bitrus Adze, the youth of CAN in Delta State, and all who were touched by his life and service.

"May we find comfort in our shared memories and in the knowledge that his spirit will continue to inspire us.

## Okpebholo Mourns As Oldest Catholic Bishop Answers Final Call

Thomas Oleghe, believed to be the oldest Catholic priest in Nigeria, is dead. He died at 104.

A statement issued by Gabriel Dunia, the Bishop of Auchi, Bishop Oleghe died at 2.30 am on Sunday.

He was buried on Wednesday, November 27, 2024.

According to the statement made available to Sunday Independent, "With gratitude to God for a life well lived on earth, I hereby inform you of the passing of the Rt. Rev. MSGR Thomas Oleghe, the oldest Catholic priest in Nigeria as

of today, to the great beyond at approximately 2.30 am this morning, November 24, 2024.

"He was of the Diocese of Auchi. He died at the age of 104. May his lovely and gentle soul continue to rest in perfect peace. Amen.

"We have resolved to celebrate his funeral on Wednesday, November 27, 2024.

Meanwhile, the Edo State governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has commiserated with the Catholic community in the state, following the death of Monsignor

Thomas Oleghe.

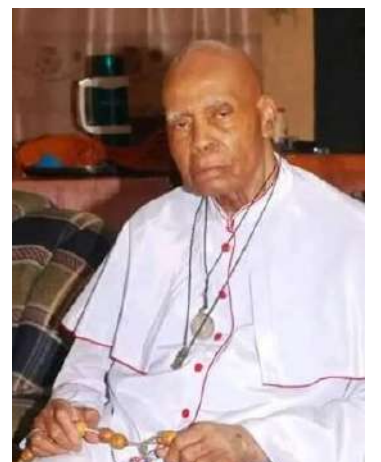
In a statement issued on Monday by the governor's Chief Press Secretary, Fred Itua, Governor Okpebholo said the exemplary life of Fr. Oleghe is a worthy lesson for Nigerians.

He stressed that Oleghe's humility, sacrifices, and lives he touched while alive would never be forgotten, and prayed that God would grant his family, the Catholic community in Nigeria, especially the Auchi Diocese, the fortitude to bear the loss.

Okpebholo stated: "Fr. Oleghe

hailed from Igiode town in Agenebode, Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State. Although he lived a fulfilled life and died at the ripe age of 104 years, we will continue to miss his fatherly roles and how he touched many lives.

"On behalf of the people and Government of Edo State, I want to extend my deepest condolences to the family of late Fr. Oleghe, the Catholic Church Community in Nigeria, especially the Auchi Diocese. May God grant his soul eternal rest, amen."



Late Bishop Thomas Oleghe

# Believing

## Welcome To Advent!

**H**appy New Month my dear reader and welcome to the Advent season! Welcome to the month of celebration! Today is the first day of the month. It is the first day of your month of blessings and celebrations! It is also the first day and the first Sunday of Advent.

Advent is derived from the Latin word Ad-venire which to come to. It is a liturgical season that marks the joyful anticipation and preparation for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. During this period of Advent we shall celebrate the twofold coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We shall mark the Second Coming of Jesus in glory which covers from the first day of advent to December 16th and His coming at Christmas which covers from December 17th to December 24th. Advent season

ushers in the Christmas season. The climax of the Christmas season will take place on December 25th when we shall celebrate the Birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This season of Advent calls for preparation. The Scriptural readings will guide us on how to prepare for this sacred season.

Child of God, today is your day! This first day of December is going to be a new dawn for you! It is a day of blessing, a day of favour! Today is a day of divine fulfillment. It is a day you will live to remember! God has come to fulfill all His promises.

As the book of Jeremiah 33:14-16 rightly declares, "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah." House of Is-

rael here could mean your house. It could be your kindred or even your nation! God has remembered you!

Child of God, today is the day the Lord is referring to! From this day henceforth all the promises God made concerning you must surely come to fulfillment. This month of December will be a month of divine fulfillment. All the promises of God in your life will be fulfilled before the end of this year. There will be no carry over!

The Lord God further declares, "In those days I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." Our Lord Jesus Christ is this righteous Branch God will use Him to execute justice and righteousness in our favour. He will deliver you from all forms of injustice and he will use you as a

### Fr. John Damian Adizie, PGB

Altar of Divine Mercy  
Eucharistic Adoration  
Ivye, Uromi, Edo State, Nigeria.  
(Opp. Setraco Construction Company).  
Mobile: +234 7043170180.  
WhatsApp: +234 7053425748.



channel of justice.

And "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'" Child of God, this very day and in this month of December as the Lord God has declared, you will be saved! You will be saved from danger! You will be saved from the hands of your enemies! You will be saved from evil arrows! You will be saved from all forms of attack! You will be saved from

accident! You will be saved from the forces of darkness! You will be saved from robbery attack! You will be saved from kidnappers! Above all, you will be saved from eternal damnation!

No evil will ever come near you. No weapon fashioned against you shall prosper. God will surround you with the pillars of fire. He will protect you! He will defend you! God will bless you! You shall dwell securely in your own land. And it shall be well with you in Jesus name – Amen!

## God Is The Only One We Have

It is worthy to praise, adore, appreciate, thank, honour, exalt and glorify the omnipotence God because His mercy remains forever. God is the one and the only one we have. God is the king that has been doing things for us. He made and know everybody very well. The Bible says in Psalm 100:3...know that the Lord is God, it is He who made us, and we are his, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture" God knows the way we are.

The powerful people of the world are looking at the faces the way Samuel was looking at faces during the process of appointing king for Israel among the children of Jesse but God looked at the heart (Samuel 16:7). God Almighty is the being to worship, serve and bow down our heads for. What is evil? It is God because He does whatever He likes. An unquestionable God who asked Jeremiah is anything too hard for me (Jeremiah 32:27). He made a man to be blind from birth so that His work might be displayed in the man's life (John 9:1-5). He restored

the sight of the blind man and made the lame to work. All these were done by Him, the Almighty God. He is so magnanimous and great that the Bible say in Ecclesiastes 6:1e3-14 "Consider what God has done, who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are bad, consider God has made the one as well as the other" God lives in both the light and darkness. He owns the good and the bad. Whatever position or situation a person finds himself or herself is with the consent of God.

The Bible says in Exodus 4:11-12 "The Lord said to him (Moses), who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or make him blind? Is it not I, the Lord. Also Amos 3:6 says "...when disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it" Furthermore, the book of Isaiah 45:7 says "I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil, I the Lord, do all these things" Brethren it becomes pertinent for people to comprehend that it is God and

there is no other. He said in Isaiah 45:5 that I am the Lord, and there is no other apart from me there is no God". God says He is beginning and the end (Alpha and Omega). Therefore it is required for people to praise and exalt God because He does what he likes. Imagine the story of King Ahab of Israel who wanted to go into war with Aram and takeover the city. In fact, God wanted to deal with king Ahab for his deeds. He made all the prophets of God king Ahab consulted before embarking on warfare with king of Aram.. All the prophets prophesied that Ahab would come back from the war victorious. But his friend king Judah, Jehoshaphat enquired if there was any other prophet of God that would be consulted before going into the war. King Ahab told Jehoshaphat that there is one prophet of God remaining but Ahab never liked the prophet called Micaiah because all his prophecies for King Ahab were not good.

However king of Judah insist-

Pastor Oloruntimilehin  
Joshua Daramola J.P.  
a.k.a Bosoro  
08023020108



ed he should be invited to consult and prophesy. Prophet Micaiah was the only one that God had put into his mouth the true prophesy that king Ahab would be killed in the war. The servant that went for Micaiah told him that his prophesy should be same as the other prophets. But Micaiah told him he would only tell the king what God tells him. Initially Micaiah told the king he would be victorious, but he made Micaiah to swear and tell him the truth. Then prophet Micaiah told him he would not be victorious. The king of Israel was furious and told king of Judah that prophet never prophesy anything good for me. Then Micaiah continued according to the Bible I King 22:1-23 "...So the Lord has put a lying spirit to the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord had decreed disaster for you". Proph-

et Micaiah was slapped by one of the other prophets and queried where Micaiah got his own spirit. Eventually Micaiah was imprisoned for his prophecies. But he declared king Ahab would not return safely (verse 24-37). Brethren, Ahab's story shows that God is responsible for good and evil. Therefore no one does evil or good that does it on his or her own. A person cannot be killed without the consent of God. Similarly a dead person cannot be revived without the God's hand in it. In same vein a true prophet of God would always be bold and courageous to deliver God's message. He or she would be prepared to face any consequence of his or her prophesy. Therefore let everybody thank and appreciate God because He owns everybody, knows everybody. May His name be exalted in name of Jesus.

## I Want To Go Back To My First Ex

Temi has one desire: to reunite with her ex, whom she left four years ago. Although she has been in other relationships since, none have come close to what she had with him. Determined to take control of her love life, she's ready to put aside her pride and give love another chance. She has decided to visit him and ask for a second chance. Despite their breakup, they have stayed good friends, but now Temi wants him back—not just as a friend, but as her lover for life.

"We broke up four years ago because he cheated with my best friend. When he told me about it, I got angry and I stopped talking to him. Since then, he has been begging me to forgive him and come back to him. Aside from that, he has never stopped sending me money. I am currently doing my youth service in Ibadan and I am planning to visit him at his workshop, but I don't have the courage yet.

"After I left him, I have dated four other guys, and they are nothing close to my ex. In fact, they are like a weapon fashioned

against me. It's either he is a chronic liar, or a woman beater, or a cheater. I came to realise that my ex is the best of them. I regretted leaving him, but my pride did not allow me to go back to him when he was begging me to come back to him. I even swore that I won't return to him. But as it is now, I am ready to crawl on my knees to beg him to accept me back, I just hope he will accept me.

"I have not seen him face to face for the past three years after our break up. But we have been communicating, he has always reached out to me. Whenever I called him that I needed money, he wouldn't hesitate to send it. I know he still loves me. And I have not stopped loving him too. We met when I was in my final year in secondary school. I am a tall girl, (6.2 feet tall) and look older than my age. Right from when I was 12 years, I had already started getting passes from guys. But when I told them my age, they wouldn't believe me. I was 17 when we started dating, I looked 25 then. He was my first love and we were together for three years. It broke my heart

when he told me he slept with my best friend. I didn't catch him, he was the one that told me. I think the girl wanted him to leave me; she was threatening him to make their affair open. He was afraid the girl would tell me. He decided to tell me himself.

"I was in pain, so I stopped talking to him and the girl. That was when I got admission into the university. I was happy I didn't get to see both of them. But he never stopped reaching out to me. Now, I don't know if I should just move on or I should go and beg him as I have planned. Won't I look stupid? I know he might have someone else in his life. I just want to give it a try. If I get rejected I would know that at least I tried."

Dear Temi, I won't discourage you from doing what feels right for you. You know your ex better than anyone, and maybe you have noticed signs that he wants you back. However, I think it's important to approach this carefully. Avoid coming across as too desperate, so he doesn't take advantage

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of the situation or disrespect you in the future. A good way to start is by reconnecting as friends. Visit him, spend time together, and try to rebuild your friendship. This will give you the chance to observe him closely and find out important things, like whether he is seeing someone else or still has feelings for you. Also, take things slowly—don't rush into anything physical too soon. That could complicate things and ruin the chances of building something meaningful.

Hello readers, thanks for reading through. You can inbox your opinions or share your own experiences.

## THE LITERARY ORBIT

## The Semantics Of Nigerian Misogyny

GABRIELLA OPARA

Nigeria is harming its women with its disregard for their rights and by promoting incel culture and gender-based hate crimes.

In 2023, a Nigerian franchise of the international food chain Burger King joined in on some misogynistic 'banter' about Nigerian women. The original tweet from a now-suspended account trolled women by classifying them into Baddies, Amotekuns and Civilians; loosely categorizing them into business owners, 9-5ers, and entrepreneurs, respectively, who have certain music tastes, and can be found in specific locations and churches in Nigeria.

Burger King Nigeria joined the trend, ranking their female customers as such. The ad was pulled down shortly after making its rounds on social media. Globally, this is not the first time Burger King has made sexist marketing campaigns. In 2018, the food chain promised Russian women a lifetime of free meals if they became pregnant for a World Cup football player.

Despite the removal of the ad, Burger King Nigeria helped cement an ideology that it was okay for Nigerian women to be talked down on and classified according to the whims of a man. The term Baddie, Amotekun and Civilian might seem innocuous, but when compared to the Beckys and Stacys popularized by American incels, it takes on new meanings.

## THE FAR-REACHING EFFECTS OF GENDER BIASES

Sexism is quite ingrained in the Nigerian ecosystem that even when companies try to spotlight the skills and abilities of a woman, they miss by a wide margin. The Amstel Malta #WeGotBalls advert of the Super Falcons for the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup is one such case. With its tagline, creating a separation between women, and showcasing discomfort within female football except if the women acted like men, Amstel Malta was telling audiences that women don't belong in sports unless they have 'balls' like men. According to Atilola Oluwademilade Adeyinka, founder of SirenCo, a feminist non-profit organization, these stereotypes are a constant uphill battle that even women who work in these companies can't fight against. She said:

Most Nigerian companies cater to the male gaze. Generally, when they push out marketing content, they pander to what men think, even when they have women in their teams. They just want to cater to the male demographic. So those marketing tactics are very intentional. It happened with the Mummy Zee thing too, where brands that should know better were applauding something very harmful to the very heavily pregnant woman who had to be waking up by 4 a.m. to cook for a man.

Beyond ad campaigns and social media discourse, these stereotypes seep into daily offline activities, increasing a misogynistic ideology that has been in existence for centuries. However, the fast-paced world of online spaces makes it easier to form a community that breeds hate against women, especially if they are nonconformists.



Gabriella Opara

Sometimes, this hate spurns into gender-based violence.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe states that hate crimes targeting a specific gender are, 'criminal offences motivated by bias against a person's gender.' According to Chioma Agwuegbo, the founder of women's rights advocacy organization, TechHer, hate crimes against women come in different forms. 'It could be online harassment, bullying, trolling, or nonconsensual intimate image abuse,' she said. 'It could then go offline and become really violent.'

These acts don't happen by chance; many of them are thoroughly thought out before they are enacted. In some cases, groups of men are encouraged by their male counterparts to be hostile towards women because it increases their belief of being an alpha, or solidifies an incel mindset. However, terms like this can diminish the far-reaching negative effects of such movements, making it seem like a foreign concept that has no place in Nigeria. Agwuegbo said:

A number of our cultures in Nigeria, and on the continent, are actually incel culture by another name. We have cultures where men don't have to go out and get women for themselves, where women are promised to men. We had communities in the southern part of Nigeria where people who couldn't pay back their loans would say 'take my daughter, my wife, or my sister'. Or where they 'will marry wife for you' [sic]. If you look at the roots of it, that's incel culture as well.

In a bid to create a safer world for themselves, more women are raising their voices, calling for the right to be heard, the right to move freely, the right to live without fear, and for the end of femicides. Despite their efforts, however, most of them are regarded as radical feminists whose anger will yield no results.

Over three weekends in July 2024, Adekinya and her SirenCo team were joined by over 120 women who participated in a walk against sexual harassment, organized by SirenCo. But they were met with scorn and opposition during their campaign against assault. This was an unexpectedly jarring experience for Desiree Ogunkola, writer and assistant communications team lead at SirenCo. Ogunkola said that women are the ones who fight for women. While a few men try, women are the champions. However, the women fighting against a patriarchal and misogynistic society are 'a small minority that's exceedingly loud.' Ogunkola told me:

**Most Nigerian companies cater to the male gaze. Generally, when they push out marketing content, they pander to what men think, even when they have women in their teams.**

We organized the walks digitally but the reality was very startling when we showed up in our numbers. I assumed half of the world knew the information we were sharing, so I didn't think we would have that much opposition, even from women. 20 minutes into the walk we had our first nega-

tive interaction with a man while carrying our placards saying, 'No means no. Stop raping women.' He stopped us and said he was going to rape whoever he wanted. Cognitively, I know that it's something that's ingrained because of incel culture, patriarchal culture, and Nigeria in general; the religious and social limits on dressing have contributed to that. But it was honestly the most jarring experience.

A report by the National Bureau of Statistics states that rape incidences increase yearly in Nigeria. According to the 2022 Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria (pg 84), rape cases increased from 48 per cent in 2021 to 65 per cent in 2022. Almost one in three (31 per cent) women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence in Nigeria, according to a 2022 report by UNICEF.

## THE LAW HATES WOMEN

In a 2021 article by Amnesty International, the former country director for Nigeria, Osai Ojigho, stated that Nigerian women and girls are failed by the society and systems that ought to protect them from harm. 'Concrete actions have not been taken to tackle the rape crisis in Nigeria with the seriousness it deserves,' Ojigho said. 'It [is] increasingly difficult for survivors to get justice while allowing perpetrators to get away with gross human rights violations.'

This is one of the reasons lawyer and gender advocate, Ito Eze-Anaba, established Mirabel Centre in 2013. When the sexual assault reference centre started eleven years ago, it struggled to get support and funding, despite the numerous cases of gender-based violence they had and the survivors they needed to provide support for. Joy Koya, a trauma counsellor for the centre, said:

We started off with seeing an average of 20 survivors in a month, and there was a lot of, 'Oh, it's not happening. It's not true. You guys must be making up data.' But by the time we started putting the word out there, showing them real-life data, it became very real, in their faces. It also made people know there was somewhere they could come to, to receive psychosocial support and treatment. Those numbers quickly rose, and we began seeing an average of 80 clients monthly. And this has continued over the years.

Since its launch, the centre has handled over 80,000 rape and sexual assault cases, with survivors ranging from a three-month-old baby to an 82-year-old woman.

In 2015, Nigeria's former president, Goodluck Jonathan signed the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) act into law. The VAPP act criminalizes physical and sexual violence, while effectively defining rape beyond non-consensual penetration and providing compensation for [female and male] victims of rape. Recently, however, Senator Jibrin Isah of Kogi East proposed a repeal of the 2015 VAPP act, raising concerns over the word choice of some parts of the legislation. He also argued that the definition of consent is ambiguous and the compensation for rape is inadequate. The bill has passed its second reading and has been met with anger and dismay by Nigerian women.

So far, the VAPP act has been the

most effective form of legislation against gender-based violence in Nigeria. By calling for the repeal of the act, Senator Isah and anyone who agrees with his proposal are deepening the chasm in the Nigerian legal system that leaves women unprotected. 'As feminists, we're very loud, we know how to make our voices carry, but we're so few and far between,' Ogunkola said. 'The internet kind of confuses people, making them think we're a great majority but we're not. We're a small number that knows how to get heard.'

For Agwuegbo, walks and talks matter, but what makes them truly effective is a judiciary system that cares about its people. She argued that a legislative, executive and judiciary government arms that focus on consequences for criminal behaviour will help reduce crime. She told me:

I've been a part of protests in this country for over ten years, and we can advocate from today till Jesus comes, but until our laws meet us and say, 'If you rape a woman, you are going to go to jail for a long time,' we are not going to see a lot of progress. Our laws actually have to criminalize sexual violence against women and girls.

Adeyinka believes that Nigeria is a space that encourages misogyny and 'inceldom'. 'Men understand these things but don't want to call it out because it makes it very clear to them that they are also perpetrators,' she said, 'And when they admit that this alpha male nonsense and their misogyny is directly affecting women, they would have to be held accountable, and they do not want that.'

Whether it's an alpha male culture being heralded by the likes of social media figures like Andrew Tate and Babatunde Shola, or an incel mindset quickly growing in the minds of their followers, one thing is established: women will always be fodder in these conversations. Men become emboldened to share their 'wins' with their online community, resulting in the likes of Killaboi confessing to murdering his girlfriend in 2023, and Surajudeen Oyewale, aka SirJarvis, confessing (in a now-deleted Tweet) that he physically 'disciplined' his wife.

On 30 June 2024, female students of the College of Medicine, University of Lagos, began protesting online through the hashtag #EndSAinCMUL, alleging that male students in the university were sexually assaulting students with impunity and making a joke of it on group chats. Months after, cases of sexual assault and femicide are increasing across the country. In a recent case, Ayomide Adeleye, a 23-year-old student of Olabisi Onabanjo University was arrested by the police for allegedly kidnapping and killing Christianah Idowu, a 300 level student of the Federal University of Agriculture in Abeokuta, when she resisted his sexual assault. This news came weeks after she was reported missing on 19 August.

*Gabriella Opara is a Lagos-based journalist featured in The Guardian UK, OkayAfrica, Quartz, Mail & Guardian, BellaNaija, and more. She writes news, culture, and lifestyle features.*

*Continues in THE REPUBLIC (<https://republic.com.ng>), November 10, 2024.*

## THE LITERARY ORBIT

# Felix Shaba: Nigerian In Diaspora Making Waves Through Book Writing

EJIKEME OMENAZU  
LAGOS

Dr Shaba Felix may not be a household name in parts of Nigeria, but in the United Kingdom where he is based, the multiple degrees holder has carved a niche for himself as an author, having come out with three novels.

Incidentally, the author with multiple degrees, did not specialise in the Arts as his various degrees are in such areas as Corporate Finance and Investment and International Finance.

Shaba, who hails from the Oso community in Akoko Edo Area of Edo State, lives in London and Coordinates the GAFIN Charitable Foundation which focuses on empowerment of women and young girls through diverse programmes.

From several indications, he is indeed not a 'stranger' in his home state and the country, going by some of his activities.

So far, he has three novels in his kitty. Interestingly, the three were published this year. They are *Glory Rose: A Story of Shattered Vows and Renewed Passion* (December 2024); *Amarachi's Tangled Threads* (June 2024), and *Just Yesterday: A Journey of Strength and Change* (May 2024).

Speaking on the impact of his published works, which have local settings and focus on national issues, he tells Sunday Independent from his London base: "My books— *Just Yesterday: A Journey of Strength and Change*, *Amarachi's Tangled Threads*, and *Glory Rose: A Story of Shattered Vows and Renewed Passion*—are powerful tools for inspiration and empowerment, resonating deeply with readers from diverse backgrounds.

"*Just Yesterday* emphasises resilience and determination, inspiring youths and mothers to overcome challenges and achieve greatness regardless of circumstances.

"*Amarachi's Tangled Threads* explores themes of cultural heritage, self-discovery, and modern aspirations. It encourages young people to embrace their roots while striving for personal growth.

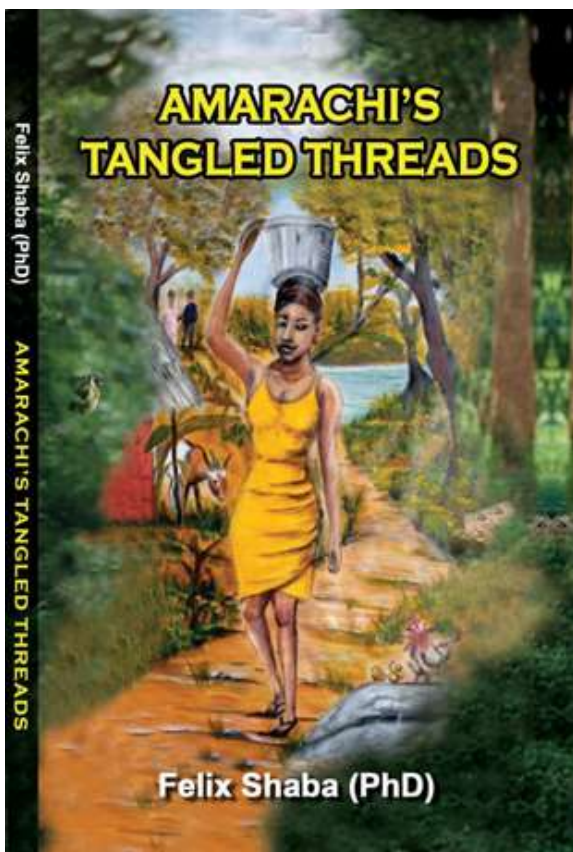
"*Glory Rose* delves into the resilience required to rebuild after adversity. It highlights themes of love, faith, and second chances, empowering families and communities to find hope and renewal."

Shaba informs that these books are currently available on Amazon, providing global access to readers. He assures that efforts are underway to distribute copies across Nigeria, ensuring that the empowering messages of the books reach a wider audience, including those without digital access, and resonate within local communities.

Shaba also reveals that he plans to go into educational publications. According to him, "I plan to develop educational materials tailored to school curricula to further contribute to societal progress. These publications will focus on: Entrepreneurship and Financial Literacy: Equipping young people and women with the tools to achieve



Felix Shaba



economic independence; Leadership Development: Encouraging critical thinking, self-confidence, and a sense of responsibility; Cultural Heritage: Providing culturally relevant content that fosters pride in identity and tradition."

This initiative, he explains, aims to equip students with skills to navigate modern challenges; deliver high-quality, culturally resonant educational content; support educators with practical resources aligned with global standards."

On *Hopes and Aspirations* for youth, women, and children, he says: "I aspire to improve the lives of youth, women, and children by addressing key areas that shape their future: Youth Development: I aim to establish platforms that inspire resilience, innovation, and leadership among young people.

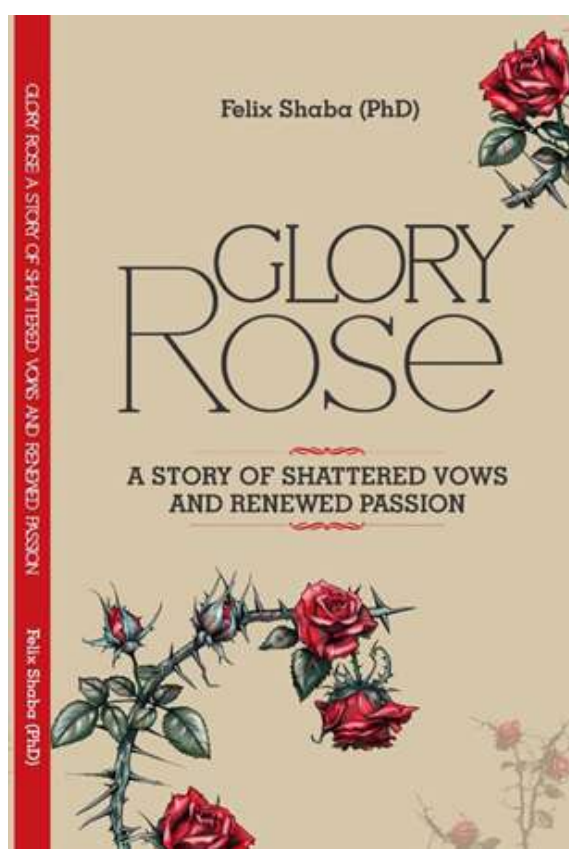
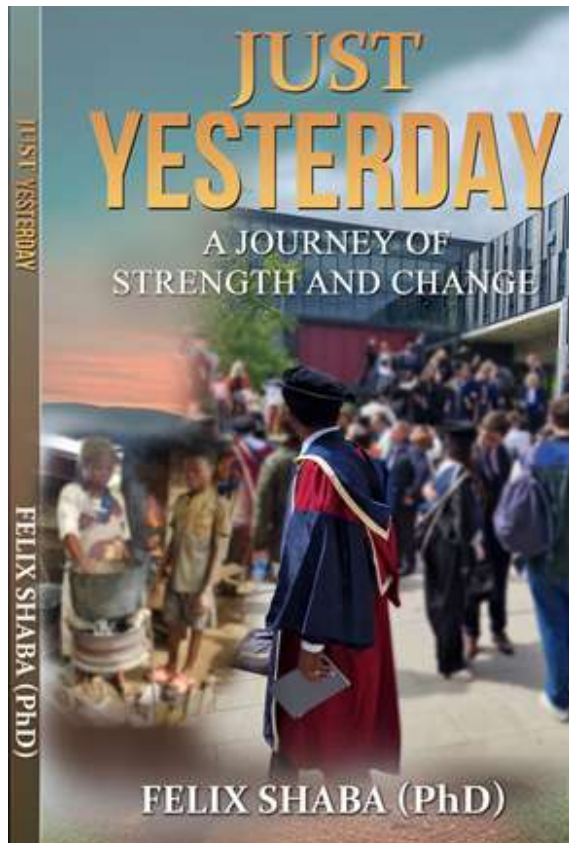
"By enhancing educational ac-

cess and creating entrepreneurial opportunities, we can empower them to unlock their potential and drive societal progress."

On *Women's and Young Girls Empowerment*, Shaba says: "My vision is to equip women and young girls, primarily those in rural areas, with the skills, education, and resources necessary for financial independence and leadership roles, creating a ripple effect of empowerment across families and communities."

Speaking on *Child Welfare*, he stresses, "I am committed to advocating for initiatives that expand children's access to high-quality education, nutrition, and healthcare, equipping them with the necessary foundation for growth and success."

Shaba explains that his skills, aspirations, and experiences align



with his mission to uplift youth, women, and children through education, empowerment, and resilience-building initiatives.

He stresses, "By blending my professional expertise with the inspiring messages of hope and determination conveyed in my books, I aim to contribute meaningfully to creating a society where everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential and lead fulfilling lives.

"With efforts underway to make my books widely available in hard copy across Nigeria, I am committed to ensuring these empowering stories reach more individuals, inspiring them to overcome challenges and achieve greatness.

"This vision reflects my unwavering commitment to driving positive change and building a brighter, more equitable future for all."

Going through his expansive resume, one can easily see what

makes this multi-talented Nigerian tick. Dr. Shaba's extensive academic background (He has a PhD, MSc, MA, BSc and several proficiency certificates in different areas of human endeavour), strategic leadership abilities, and dedication to fostering positive social change make him a strong candidate for roles focused on development and policy implementation. His proven ability to design impactful programmes, engage diverse stakeholders, and address pressing societal challenges positions him as an asset to any team or organisation committed to driving meaningful progress.

Some of his attributes that make him stand out among his peers include his works in the area of youth empowerment: Through his roles at the GAFIN Charitable Foundation and Grace to Grace International Centre.

Dr. Shaba has spearheaded youth-focused literacy, vocational training, and health initiatives, enabling hundreds to acquire life-changing skills.

On education advocacy, he has designed and implemented innovative education programmes for underserved communities, leveraging data-driven approaches to enhance outcomes and drive sustainable change.

Also, on poverty alleviation, he has led programmes that address systemic barriers to economic opportunity, including vocational training for women and youth, strategic fundraising, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

As a policy research expert, Dr. Shaba has extensive experience in conducting research, policy development, and programme evaluation, with significant contributions to strategic service delivery at Essex County Council.

Also, although he stays in London, Dr. Shaba thinks of home. This can easily be seen from the settings and characters depicted in his novels as well as several inputs he has made towards emancipation of the poor, especially the women and girls through empowerment efforts particularly in his home state, Edo. He can indeed be described as a true Nigerian, a round peg in a round hole.

Shaba has a PhD Business obtained in 2019 from Oxford Brookes University, UK. Incidentally, his thesis is on 'Women Empowerment through Self-Selected Groups: The Case of LAPO Microfinance Bank Ltd'. He also has MSc in Corporate Finance & Investment obtained in 2007 from London Metropolitan University, UK; also MA in International Finance, which he earned in 2006 also from London Metropolitan University, UK and B.Sc. (Hons) Finance, in 2000, obtained from University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Finally, asked to describe himself, he chuckles, saying: "I am a highly educated and motivated professional dedicated to driving positive change through philanthropy and community development. I am skilled in implementing transformative initiatives, strategising research, and engaging stakeholders to enhance household welfare."

Looking at his books and welfare activities, there is no way anyone can fault him.

# Northern Interest: ACF In The Dock



Tinubu



Osuman

## AUSTIN OBOH

The Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Wednesday, last week, expressed its desire to support a Northern candidate in 2027 after accusing President Bola Tinubu of anti-Northern policies. In a caustic communique issued after its National Executive Council meeting in Kaduna State, the influential Northern group deplored the harsh economic conditions brought upon Nigerians, especially in the North, as a result of the policies of the Tinubu-led government. The accusation provoked a series of actions which caused ripples across the country days after, bringing Nigeria's regional fault line and current socio-economic realities into bolder view.

In the communique signed by its National Publicity Secretary, Professor Tukur Muhammad-Baba, the ACF faulted the leadership selection process by the Tinubu-led government, which it said was flawed and allowed people without competence or experience to rise to positions of power and authority.

The forum also called on the Federal Government to review, reassess, reevaluate and re-order the direction of its economic policies in order to make them more humane.

"Security is an irreducible minimum of human existence. In this regard, insecurity in its various manifestations remains the most worrisome challenge of Arewa people, that has even started to corrosively undermine the authority of government such that people have started to ask what the purpose

of government is!" the communique read.

It continued: "That those whose responsibility it is to provide security will be saying they are doing their best is unacceptable. The minimum duty of government is to safeguard life and property, and doing anything less is a failure.

"Members expressed displeasure at the current and continuing impoverishing of the proverbial common men and women in the country due to the economic policies of the current administration.

"The Meeting noted in particular that Arewa people remain at great disadvantage, being already relatively worse off economically, compared to other parts of Nigeria. Livelihoods are currently dependent on micro activities. The region faces acute and chronic food insecurity; its youths lack education and skills training. Daunting as these may be, they can be reversed. The time to think big is now.

"Notwithstanding the parlous state of Arewa's glaring challenging economic conditions, the policies of the current Federal Government have continued to make matters much worse, with little indications of needed sensitivity to the precarious existential conditions of Arewa people. Succinctly stated, economic reforms, while indeed desirable, should not impoverish the same people that they are meant to serve; the people may not be alive to reap the putative benefits."

The ACF Chairman, Mamman Mike Osuman (SAN), highlighted the alarming rate

of attacks, kidnapping, and killing in the region, stressing that these incidents had become too common.

"The North is currently under siege from various threats, including bandits, terrorists, kidnappers, and unjust treatment. We must come together to address these challenges. As leaders, we must demonstrate prudence and concern for domestic and environmental problems affecting our region."

Recall that the forum had endorsed the Shekarau-led League of Northern Democrats, convened by elder statesman, Dr Umar Ardo, and recently launched at a meeting attended by key members of the Northern elite in Abuja.

The League of Northern Democrats is a group comprising former governors, senators, and other prominent figures from the region.

According to Osuman, the objectives of the League aligned with the ACF's goals.

## ACF SUSPENDS OSUMAN

The hardline position taken by Osuman prompted the leadership of the ACF, on Thursday, to suspend him, especially given the widespread reactions to the communique across the country.

The Yoruba socio-political group, Afenifere, the Igbo socio-cultural body, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, and other groups threw their weight behind President Tinubu, insisting that the policies of his predecessor, Muhammadu Buhari, created the conditions leading to the current hardship in the country.

In a letter signed by its Sec-

retary-General, Murtala Aliyu, the ACF suspended Osuman, stating that he made the statement without consulting with other leaders and members of the ACF.

Part of the suspension letter read: "The attention of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) has been drawn to widely reported statements credited to Mr. Mamman Mike Osuman, SAN, OFR, Chairman, ACF National Executive Committee, which were made during the meeting of the NEC, held on Wednesday, November 20, 2024, at ACF Headquarters, Kaduna.

"In particular, Mr. Osuman was quoted as saying that the North will back a northern candidate for the Presidency, come 2027. The statements were made by the NEC chairman without consulting or discussing with other leaders and members of the ACF and, thus, reflected Mr. Osuman's personal opinion only.

"ACF rejects Mr. Mamman Mike Osuman's statements in their entirety. For this reason, the leadership of the ACF's Board of Trustees (BOT) and that of its NEC has decided to place Mr. Mamman Mike Osuman on suspension with immediate effect.

"A committee has been constituted for further investigations."

Reacting to the controversy ignited by the ACF, the Special Adviser to the President on Policy Communication, Daniel Bwala, said: "There is no need for the President to have a say because they (ACF) are calling for an Arewa person to run for President. That means the Arewa

person can run from any political party."

He added: "The simple answer is that we don't want to heat up the polity. We have not gotten to the point where people will be talking about 2027. We are focused on providing good governance to Nigeria."

Similarly, the ruling All Progressives Congress faulted the position of the ACF, stating that while the group had the right to express its opinion, it could not claim to speak for the entire North.

The National Publicity Director of the APC, Bala Ibrahim, said: "This has always been the position of the ACF. They have always been advocating and clamouring for their own. The ACF is not a political party. It is an association. It is more like a sociocultural organisation. But now that they have come out clearly to say they are not going to back a non-Northern candidate come 2027, so be it.

"But it is too early to talk about crossing the river when you have not gotten to the point of getting to the bridge. We agree that in politics or under democracy, people have right to their opinions. The position of the ACF is not against the provision of democracy or the constitution. They can clamour and ask people to vote for their own, but the choice to do that rests on the people.

"As long as they are not going to insist on forcing people to choose who to vote for, we don't have any quarrel with that. In any case, let them wait and see for the party to present a can-

## Politics

# Youth Groups On Radical Grounds



Gowon



Bwala



Ibrahim

CONTINUED FROM P.17 →

didate.”

### NORTHERN GROUPS BACK OSUMAN

Nevertheless, several northern groups declared support for Osuman, the suspended Chairman of the ACF.

The pro-Osuman groups, mainly youths, described the action of the ACF leadership as unjust and politically motivated.

The groups were the Coalition of Northern Groups, Northern Youth Council of Nigeria, and the Arewa Youth Consultative Council.

The Coordinator of CNG, Katsina State chapter, Abdullahi Kabir, described the suspension as an attempt to silence the North, wondering why Osuman would be punished for speaking the truth.

Kabir noted that Osuman's statement resonated with the opinion of 90 per cent of northerners, adding that the region would resist any attempt to silence it.

“As the Coalition of Northern Group, Katsina State chapter, we do not support the suspension of Mr Osuman. We believe his statement is valid, as it resonates with the opinion of 80-90 per cent of the people of Arewa. Moreover, as a Nigerian citizen, Mr Osuman has every right to express his views.

“However, we must reiterate that the Arewa Consultative Forum does not represent the collective voice of the northern people and lacks the authority to dictate the political direction of Arewa. The ACF's history, marked by certain failures to act in North's best interests, has further eroded its credibility in this regard.

“If these recent actions are part of a broader attempt to silence northern voices or restrict the region's democratic expression, we firmly oppose such efforts. The North will stand united to safeguard its rights and ensure its aspirations are upheld through inclusivity and collective decision-making,” Kabir said.

Also speaking, the National Coordinator of CNG, Jamilu Charanchi, noted that the North was not happy with Tinubu's

administration and policies.

Charanchi said: “Actually, I don't think he (Osuman) lied in what he said, because people are not happy with the system. I am telling you 80 to 90 per cent of the Northern people will adopt a Northern candidate without a doubt because if you take a census, they are seriously not happy with the system.

“You see, 2027 is still very far to conclude on who we are going to support, but if things keep moving the way they are moving, I doubt if Northern Nigeria will support President Tinubu. Not only northern Nigeria, Nigerians in general – I doubt if they will support President Tinubu.”

On its part, the NYCN described Osuman's suspension as a “big disgrace to northern extraction” and accused ACF members of “selling their voice for a peanut.”

The National President of NYCN, Isah Abubakar, questioned the rationale behind the suspension, insisting that Osuman's criticism of Tinubu was a truthful reflection of the feelings of many Nigerians.

Abubakar expressed concern that the suspension was a reflection of the current state of Northern Nigeria, “where everyone works for selfish interests.”

He said: “What has the chairman said that is not a truthful reflection of what many couldn't say without fear or favour? We feel highly ashamed of the behaviour of the so-called leaders of the ACF in suspending their chairman for being bold enough to tell the truth to power at a time when everyone is afraid to do so.

“This is not the Northern Nigeria that Prof. Ango Abdullahi stood for, not the Northern Nigeria of late Yusuf Maitama Sule, or the Northern Nigeria that late Justice Mamman Nasir stood for or late Chief Sunday Bolorunduro Awoniyi sacrificed for.

“We, the northern youths, are worried about the direction of our region. We are worried that our leaders have lost touch with the reality on the ground. We are worried that our leaders are more interested in pursuing their selfish interests than in serving the people.”

The NYCN called on the ACF's National Executive Council to reverse their decision and return Osuman to his position. It also warned that failure to reverse the suspension would lead to mobilisation to shut down the ACF headquarters in Kaduna.

But the ACF later took the pains to explain its position, pointing out that it nurtured no bias against Tinubu since it consistently criticized his predecessor, Buhari – a Northerner.

The Secretary-General of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Murtala Aliyu, said the claims in some quarters that it criticised President Tinubu's administration because he is a southerner was not true.

Speaking on ‘News Night’, an ARISE NEWS Channel programme, Aliyu said that while the forum may be political, it remained impartial and non-partisan.

“I think that's an unfair judgment to say we criticise the government because a southerner is at the helm of affairs,” he said.

He added: “We were huge critics of the last northern-led administration, and our records can verify this. We have consistently brought attention to government actions and pressed for improvement when necessary.

“The ACF's official position is that selecting candidates is the responsibility of political parties. We'll assess which candidate is better for the country and the North. We're not partisan, but rather political, and our interest is the entire northern states and its benefit to the whole country. We don't take sides, and we're not against any person, including the current president.”

### GOWON INTERVENES

Bothered about the poisoned political atmosphere in the country as a result of the ACF's accusations against President Tinubu, an influential voice in the North and former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon (rtd.), on Wednesday, cautioned that whatever the North does must serve the greater interest of the country.

Gowon, who spoke when the League of Northern Democrats (LND) paid him a courtesy visit

to solicit his support for their forthcoming Northern Nigerian Political Summit in Kaduna, noted that the responsibility of maintaining Nigeria's true democracy rests on the North, and that Tafawa Balewa embodied this ideal.

The former head of state cautioned against returning to the old thinking where the old regions in the country prioritised their interest in their engagements with other parts.

Gowon, who maintained that national unity was the reason he supported the creation of multiple states, to prevent any one region from becoming too powerful and threaten the country's unity, also lamented the level of insecurity in the North.

He said: “I firmly believe, as I have always said, that the responsibility of maintaining Nigeria's true democracy rests on the North, and Baba Tafawa Balewa embodied this ideal.

“Let me also say that I hope your visit isn't just about returning to the old thinking where the North prioritises the North, the West prioritises the West, and the East prioritises the East—until, of course, the Mid-West emerged to think for itself.

“My position has always been that whatever the North does must serve the greater interest of Nigeria. From your speech, I understand that this is your intention—to ensure the North, in its current state, focuses on national unity. It was for this reason that I supported the creation of multiple states, to prevent any one region from becoming too powerful and threatening the country's unity.

“This perspective was borne out of extensive discussions with political leaders, chiefs, and various groups. The North had to make sacrifices to address fears of domination by one region, especially given the size and population of the North. At that time, there was considerable anxiety from the South about the North's dominance, which nearly led to calls for secession from all regions—the West, the East, and even the North. This deeply worried me. I was born in Nigeria, raised in Nigeria, and served a profession that represented the country's collective interest. My decision

to advocate for state creation stemmed from a desire to prevent the fragmentation of our nation.

“Even now, I recall that at one point, people believed the North wanted to secede, just as similar claims were made about the East and the West. This fear of disintegration weighed heavily on me. If we had allowed it, what would we call ourselves today? We might have ended up with separate nations—whether Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, or otherwise. I hesitate to say more, as I might risk offending someone here.”

Disclosing why he has avoided partisan politics, Gowon urged others to think beyond regional interest and focus on Nigeria as a whole.

“You know, I'm not affiliated with any political party. My only allegiance is to Nigeria. My profession shaped my belief in serving the country above all else, and I've avoided partisan politics. I encourage others to think beyond regional interests and focus on Nigeria as a whole. Differences in opinion are natural, but they should never prevent us from working together to resolve issues for the good of the country. Nigeria's population and diversity are strengths. If we can unite despite our differences, we can build the Nigeria we all envision,” he said.

Lamenting the unfortunate situation in the North as a result of insecurity, Gowon said: “I feel saddened by the challenges currently facing the North, such as the emergence of groups like the Lukurawa from Mali. Their activities have only created more problems for us.

“I urge you to remember that the North's division into states was meant to preserve national unity. Whatever you do, always prioritise the nation's interest. While cooperation among states is vital, it should never compromise Nigeria's collective good.”

It would seem that this intervention from a foremost statesman may have calmed frayed nerves at this point, but this clearly is not going to be the end of inter-regional polemics in the public sphere, having become a peculiarity of Nigerian politics.

# Tinubu Yet To Address Systemic Inequalities Faced By Women – Tyona

Rachel Wuese Tyona, a youth advocate and a consultant on youth development, is the first female Speaker of the Benue State Youth Parliament, and former Vice Chairperson, Confederation of State Youth Parliament Speakers in Nigeria. Tyona, the Founder and Executive Director, Ngodoo Development Initiative, in this interview with EJIKEME OMENAZU, speaks on some crucial issues in the polity. Excerpt:

**As the year is drawing close to an end, what programmes does your organisation, Ngodoo Development Initiative (NDI), have for the youths, especially women and the girl-child?**

The year is drawing closer to an end and NDI has no programmes lined up anymore for 2024. The organisation has taken the month left to do an in-house review and run down of the projects done in the year and to also evaluate, make plans and draw up the projects to execute next year.

**Would you say that NGOs like yours and philanthropists are doing enough to bring succor to the legions of unemployed and poor Nigerians considering the level of suffering in the land?**

As a representative of the Ngodoo Development Initiative (NDI), I must acknowledge that while NGOs like ours and philanthropists are making efforts to alleviate poverty and unemployment, there is still much work to be done. The level of suffering in Nigeria is indeed alarming, and it is heartbreaking to see many individuals and families struggling to make ends meet. While NGOs and philanthropists are providing vital support, the scale of the challenges facing Nigeria requires a more comprehensive and sustained response. There are several factors that limit the impact of NGOs and philanthropists. The number of people in need far exceeds the resources and capacity of most NGOs and philanthropists. Many NGOs rely on donations and grants, which can be unpredictable and limited. In some areas, lack of infrastructure, such as roads, electricity and water, hinders the delivery of aid and services. In some cases, government policies and regulations can create barriers to effective aid delivery. Despite these challenges, NGOs like NDI and philanthropists continue to work tirelessly to provide support to those in need. We recognise that our efforts are just a drop in the ocean, but we believe that every little bit counts. To truly bring succor to the legions of unemployed and poor Nigerians, a more collaborative and sustained effort is required from all stakeholders, including government, private sector, NGOs and philanthropists, and communities. Ultimately, addressing the complex challenges facing Nigeria requires a collective effort from all stakeholders. While NGOs like NDI and philanthropists are doing their part, we recognise that much more needs to be done to bring meaningful change to the lives of millions of Nigerians.

**Looking at the effects of the reforms being carried out by the current administration, what areas would you say the government needs to readjust so that the poor can breathe?**

The current administration's reforms have had far-reaching impacts on various sectors of the economy and society. To ensure that the poor can breathe, I would recommend that the government reassess and adjust its policies in areas like: Economic Empowerment: Implementing policies



Tyona

that promote job creation, especially in sectors that benefit low-income individuals, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction, strengthening social safety nets, like cash transfer programs, to provide a financial cushion for vulnerable populations, supporting microfinance initiatives and entrepreneurship programs that cater to low-income individuals, enabling them to start or expand small businesses. Education and Healthcare: ensuring that education is accessible and affordable for all, particularly for low-income families, strengthening the healthcare system to provide quality, affordable services to all citizens, regardless of income level, implementing nutrition programmes, such as school meal initiatives, to combat malnutrition and support healthy development. Infrastructure and Utilities: developing and implementing policies to provide affordable housing options for low-income families, ensuring that all citizens have access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and proper waste management, investing in renewable energy sources and improving the overall energy infrastructure to provide reliable and affordable electricity. Social Protection: strengthening laws and enforcing mechanisms to protect low-income individuals from exploitation, such as human trafficking and forced labor, developing and implementing effective disaster response and preparedness plans to support vulnerable populations during crises, ensuring that all policies and programs are inclusive and taking into account the specific needs and challenges faced by low-income individuals and marginalised groups. By reassessing and adjusting policies in these areas, the government can help create a more equitable society where the poor can breathe a sigh of relief.

**How do you see the recent cabinet reshuffle by President Bola Tinubu? Do you think it has cleared the doubts of Nigerians that the**

**administration can perform?**

The recent cabinet reshuffle by President Bola Tinubu has been a highly anticipated move, given the growing calls from Nigerians for change. On one hand, the reshuffle demonstrates Tinubu's willingness to make tough decisions and adapt to the country's evolving needs. The changes affect 15 ministers, with five being discharged from their duties, including the Minister of Education, Prof. Mamman Tahir; and the Minister of Women Affairs, Uju Ohanenye. Ten ministers have been reassigned to new portfolios, and seven new ministers have been appointed. While the reshuffle may have addressed some of the concerns surrounding the administration's performance, it is unclear whether it has fully alleviated the doubts of Nigerians. Eventually, the success of the reshuffle will depend on the performance of the new ministers and the administration's ability to deliver on its promises. Nigerians will be watching closely to see if the changes bring about tangible improvements in their lives.

**What is your take on the issue of gender parity as it concerned the Tinubu government? Would you say it has given women enough positions as they really deserve?**

The Tinubu government's performance on gender parity is a mixed bag. While President Tinubu pledged to promote women's inclusion in governance, the reality is that only 18.75% of his ministerial appointees are women. This falls short of the 35% Affirmative Action clause for women in appointive positions, and even further from the 50% target outlined in the 2021-2026 National Gender Policy. Furthermore, the administration's performance on women's economic empowerment and social inclusion also leaves much to be desired. For instance, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs has been criticised for not doing enough to address systemic gender inequality, instead focusing on short-term empowerment programmes. However, it is worthy to note that the Tinubu administration has made some efforts to promote women's inclusion, such as appointing women to head some government agencies and parastatals. Nevertheless, these efforts are still insufficient to address the deep-seated gender disparities in Nigeria. Overall, while the Tinubu government has made some promises and taken some steps towards promoting gender parity, it still has a long way to go in terms of delivering tangible results and addressing the systemic inequalities faced by women in Nigeria.

**How do you see the fears being raised in some quarters that the nation is fast sliding towards a one-party state? Would you say the fear is real?**

The fear of Nigeria sliding into a one-party state is a concern that has been raised by many. While the Presidency has denied allegations of President Tinubu pushing for a one-party agenda, the recent happenings in the

political landscape have indeed raised some eyebrows. The ruling party's dominance in various elections and perceived weakening of opposition parties have fuelled fears of a one-party state. However, it is essential to note that a one-party state is characterised by the absence of viable opposition parties and the concentration of power in one party. While Nigeria's current situation may not fit this definition entirely, the concerns about the country's democratic health are valid. At NDI, we believe that a strong, vibrant democracy requires a robust opposition and a level playing field for all political parties. We urge the government to ensure that the electoral process is transparent, free, and fair, and that opposition parties are allowed to operate without hindrance. Ultimately, the fear of a one-party state is real, and it is up to all stakeholders, including the government, opposition parties, civil society organisations, and citizens, to work together to strengthen Nigeria's democracy and ensure that the country remains a beacon of hope for democratic governance in Africa.

**What is your view on the outcome of the recently held Local government elections in parts of the country?**

The recently held local government elections in parts of Nigeria have been a subject of interest, and at Ngodoo Development Initiative (NDI), we have been following the developments closely. The recent local government elections in Benue State have been a subject of interest, with the All Progressive Congress (APC) winning all 23 chairmanship and 276 councillorship elections held in the state. While the Benue State Independent Electoral Commission (BSIEC) has announced the results, some may view the APC's sweep as a sign of dominance, while others might raise concerns about the lack of opposition. The outcome of the elections has also raised questions about the state of opposition parties in Benue State. With the APC winning all available seats, some may wonder if the opposition parties were given a fair chance to compete. However, the broader picture of local government elections in Nigeria is more complex. Challenges such as institutional weaknesses, lack of transparency, and electoral violence have been reported in various parts of the country. These issues undermine the integrity of the electoral process and can erode trust in local governance.

**What is your take on the frequent National Grid collapse within the year? What do you think should be done to stop this alarming trend?**

The frequent National Grid collapse in Nigeria is a pressing concern that requires immediate attention. As NDI, we are deeply worried about the impact of these collapses on the country's economy, businesses, and citizens. The root causes of these collapses are complex and multifaceted. Nigeria's power grid is outdated and in need of upgrade and expansion, regular maintenance is essential to prevent breakdowns, but

this has not been consistently done. Insufficient investment in the power sector has hindered the development of a reliable and efficient grid. In some cases, the grid collapse has been attributed to sabotage and vandalism. To address this alarming trend, we recommend the following: Regular maintenance schedules should be put in place to prevent breakdowns and ensure the grid operates efficiently; the government and private sector should invest in the power sector to improve the reliability and efficiency of the grid. Measures should be put in place to prevent sabotage and vandalism, such as increased surveillance and community engagement. Nigeria should explore alternative energy sources, such as renewable energy, to reduce dependence on the national grid and mitigate the impact of grid collapses. Regulatory bodies should be strengthened to ensure compliance with safety and operational standards.

**What do you think the government, NNPC and other stakeholders should do to make petroleum products affordable to ordinary Nigerians?**

Making petroleum products affordable to ordinary Nigerians is a pressing concern that requires a multifaceted approach. Government should implement a targeted subsidy regime that benefits the most vulnerable populations, rather than a blanket subsidy that disproportionately favors the wealthy. The government should review and adjust taxes, levies, and pricing mechanisms to ensure they are fair, transparent, and do not disproportionately burden low-income households. It should invest in the rehabilitation and expansion of Nigeria's refineries to increase domestic production and reduce reliance on imported petroleum products. The government should encourage the development and use of alternative energy sources, such as solar, wind, and hydro power, to reduce dependence on petroleum products. The NNPC Limited should ensure transparency in the pricing, allocation, and distribution of petroleum products to prevent corruption and ensure fairness. It should enhance logistics and distribution networks to reduce transportation costs, prevent product diversion, and ensure timely delivery of products to all parts of the country. It should also provide incentives and support to local refineries to increase domestic production and reduce reliance on imported petroleum products. It should invest in the development of critical infrastructure, such as pipelines, storage facilities, and jetties, to improve the efficiency and safety of petroleum products distribution. Other stakeholders can encourage private sector investment in the petroleum industry, particularly in refining, logistics, and distribution. They should engage with civil society organisations to promote transparency, accountability, and good governance in the petroleum sector. They should collaborate with international organisations and countries to access best practices, technology, and funding to support the development of Nigeria's petroleum sector. They should also educate the public about the challenges and opportunities in the petroleum sector, as well as the importance of conservation, efficient use of petroleum products, and the adoption of alternative energy sources.

## Politics

# CARF: CDHR, CACOL Beam Searchlight On Public Involvement In Project Financing, Budgeting In Lagos

EJIKEME OMENAZU  
LAGOS

The nation is in the budget season. Although President Bola Tinubu is yet to present the nation's 2025 budget to the National Assembly, many state governors have presented theirs to their various Houses of Assembly.

Lagos State governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu has, however, taken the lead by presenting the state's taken the lead few days ago by presenting the ₦3.005 trillion proposed budget before the Rt. Hon. Mudashiru Obasa-led House of Assembly for consideration.

Noting that the importance of budgeting, especially at this period, the Committee For The Defence Of Human Rights (CDHR) in collaboration with the Centre For Anti-Corruption And Open Leadership (CACOL), last Thursday, November 28, 2024, held its Citizens Accountability And Rights Forum (CARF) with the theme 'Financing Participatory Governance in Lagos State: How Much of Public Involvement?'

The event held at the Rights House, 43, Adeniyi Jones Avenue, Ikeja, Lagos State, attracted public officials, activists, journalists and the general public, especially due to the sensitive nature of budgeting, especially in Lagos State, which usually presents one of the highest budgets in the country.

Curiously, key government officials like the state Commissioner of Finance, Hon. Abayomi Oluyemi, and the Special Adviser to the Governor, Office of Political, Legislative and Civic Engagement, Dr. Abiodun Afolabi, could not be present though they were properly invited and given crucial roles to play at the event.

However, Hon. Saheed Obafemi, the Chairman, House Committee on Finance, Lagos State of Assembly, was physically present, and explained that the other officials were very busy with activities relating to the state's budget.

Welcoming the participants, Debo Adeniran, who doubles as President, Committee For The Defence Of Human Rights (CDHR), and Chairman, Centre For Anti-Corruption And Open Leadership (CACOL), noted that the Thursday's event was the ninth edition of the Citizens Accountability and Rights Forum (CARF).

He stressed that the forum is a bold step in CDHR and CACOL's commitment to contribute to creating a peaceful atmosphere between the people on the demand side of governance in Lagos State and those on the supply side.

According to him, "This platform is being organised to create an avenue where the implementers and the beneficiaries of various government policies would come together to explain, elucidate and expatiate on areas of concern for the citizenry with a view to harmonising different opinions on policies that are being implemented in the state.

"This event provides a forum for healthy exchanges of ideas so that the areas of friction between the government and the governed



Participants at the forum

would be drastically reduced if not totally eliminated because the people would have sense of belonging and the government would have the opportunity of listening to the people and explaining their positions on diverse policy issues that may crop up at a particular time.

"We are convinced that this will definitely bring about a harmonious relationship between the government and the governed. Today, we want to beam our searchlight on Lagos' finances. With the theme, 'Financing Participatory Governance in Lagos State: How Much of Public Involvement?' We would like to brainstorm on how the government is financing the various sectors in the state and how much public involvement is embedded in this activity of the government. We have tried our possible best to invite the Hon. Commissioner for Finance, Hon. Abayomi Oluyemi, to this gathering, so that any information we hear from him would be straight from the horse's mouth."

Adeniran noted that financing is the backbone of successful participatory governance, explaining that without adequate and sustainable funding, the vision of an inclusive and citizen-driven government cannot be realised.

He added: "This is because funding is required to bridge the gap between government and marginalised groups, such as low-income earners, women, and people living

in slums or remote areas.

"Resources are needed to organise community forums, town hall meetings, and stakeholder consultations across the state. Financial support can help translate meetings into actionable outcomes, such as funding for roads, schools, or healthcare facilities as prioritised by citizens.

"Financing enables the development of digital platforms, such as mobile apps, websites, for participatory budgeting, project tracking, and citizen feedback. Investments in technology can also expand the reach of participatory processes, allowing more citizens to engage through smartphones, SMS, or web tools.

"Physical infrastructures, such as community centres and meeting halls, are needed for grassroots mobilisation and engagement. Funds are essential for training government officials, community leaders, and volunteers on participatory governance principles.

Capacity-building initiatives foster effective communication, problem-solving, and project management skills, ensuring participatory processes achieve their intended outcomes."

He stressed that financing is needed to create transparent and accountable systems for managing participatory governance funds. These, he added, include publishing financial records, conducting audits, and showcasing completed

projects.

Adeniran stressed, "When citizens observe that their contributions, through taxes or levies, are used effectively, it builds trust in governance, encourages citizen ownership and further participation. The idea of focusing on the state government's policies and activities and gathering people to discuss it, is anchored on our determination to ensure that the common man on the street is not short changed by government policies and encourage an all-embracing, all-inclusive implementation of government's policies so as to enhance the socio-economic well-being of the people of the state.

"As I have always pointed out, it should be noted that the forum is not meant only for public servants, as it will also engage major service providers like electricity and communication providers, regulatory agencies, anti-corruption agencies, etc., from time to time as the occasion demands."

He urged participants to freely air their views, informing that the information gathered are well recorded, articulated as reports and books, which are preserved for future references and forwarded to the government and the relevant stakeholders for proper actions.

In his presentation, Hon. Saheed Obafemi, the Chairman, Lagos State House of Assembly Committee on Finance, Said, "The topic, 'Financing Participatory Governance in Lagos State: How Much of Public Involvement?' is apt, both as a financial expert and a legislature, noting that Lagos is the only state that invites the public and civil society to sensitise at the executive and legislative levels on the budget before it is passed.

He also noted that the government uses people's money to build infrastructures and after a problem has been tackled, another crops up, even as he laid emphasis on services in areas like transportation, health, education, security, among others.

However, the issues raised could not focus on specific budget figures as the state budgets is still in the making and could not be made

public in terms of specific facts and figures, wevcen as it hoped that as the various departments dot all the Is and crossed all the Ts, the true figures of the state's budget in 2025 would be made public by the relevant authorities.

The state Commissioner of Information, Gbenga Omotoso, was represented by Mr Odumade Mobolaji, Deputy Director of Public Affairs. He stated: "We are in a democratic setting. The government carries everyone along. Lagos deserves a round of applause as stakeholders are part of budgeting processes from the beginning to the end.

"Stakeholders take part to ensure prioritisation of projects. The Community Development Associations (CDAs) are always invited to present their demands, As funds come in, the state government does the wishes of the people.

"The private sector is involved in the form of PPP to provide funding," even as he mentioned the Lekki Free Zone and the rail lines which demand private sector involvement."

The public also contributed in form of questions, comments and suggestions, thereby making the forum very interactive and informative, even as they expressed the view that the lawmakers should critically look into the budget before passing it into law as quickly as possible.

In his closing remark, Adeniran informed that CDHR and CACOL's activities have for long been funded with subscriptions and donations from affiliates, members and patrons.

He stressed: "It is on this basis that we are soliciting your support for the organisations. We would like to do more in the service of humanity and we are ready to partner with relevant government agencies and fraternal organisations to ensure that we continue to be the voice for the hapless citizens of the country as a whole.

"I conclude by thanking you all again for honouring our invitation. We remain firmly committed to the cause of making Lagos State and Nigeria a peaceful abode for all."

**He also noted that the government uses people's money to build infrastructures and after a problem has been tackled, another crops up, even as he laid emphasis on services in areas like transportation, health, education, security, among others**

# Okada Operators Are Treated As Foreigners In Nigeria – Aguh

**What is the current attitude of the Lagos State government towards Okada riders?**

The state has not meant well for us. There have been several attacks from one policy to another. We (okada operators) are being treated as foreigners in our country. The state task force is everywhere pursuing our people in the streets. They extort huge amounts from us. We also pay huge amounts to local government agents.

**The Special Adviser, Office of Political Legislative & Civic Engagement, Lagos State Government, Dr Tajudeen Abiodun, stated at a public forum that okada riders have continued to constitute environmental nuisance on Lagos roads.**

**How would you react to this allegation?**

I cannot say that we are 100 percent pure. But, we are contributing to the economic growth of Lagos State in particular and Nigeria as a whole. For him to say that about okada drivers is very unfair and unexpected from a public officer of that status. It is only a very few of us that are bad or engage in crimes. Even car users and bus operators have their own share of nuisance. We have continued to caution our people. We talk to them in our meetings. Most of these criminals do not belong to any group.

**How do you see the current hike in fuel prices? How are okada riders surviving it?**

The fuel price is biting hard on everyone. Even those that have two or three cars have dropped them or are using one. In every situation, Nigerians have been surviving. It pains me that to fill an okada tank, we are talking about N20,000 to N30,000 which is very bad. There is nowhere in the world they do not have subsidies. A government that loves its people always subsidise one thing or another. It is only in Nigeria that nothing is subsidised. The only thing Nigerians are getting from the government, this administration has taken it away. Yet, the removal of subsidies has no positive effect on the economy or on the people. The president needs to listen to the people he is ruling and not only the cabals and people in government. During former President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, the current President Tinubu, Professor Wole Soyinka and Pastor Tunde Bakare led protests against fuel price increase and Jonathan reversed it. It is not too late for President Tinubu to reverse the removal of fuel subsidies. He should not be like the Biblical Nebuchadnezzar who thought that nobody could do anything. President Tinubu should not listen to only his ministers and advisers who have been singing his praises. This is not how he governed Lagos.

**Would you say the coming on stream of the Dangote Refinery has made things easier for transporters?**

We were happy when we heard that Dangote was building a refinery in Lagos. But, from what we are seeing now that the refinery has taken off, everybody is in shock. Instead of impacting positively on the Nigerians, its impact has been negative. Instead of making fuel prices go down, the prices have been rising on a daily basis. This is not surprising because whatever Alhaji Dangote puts his hands into, the price never comes down.

Comrade Godspower Aguh is the chairman, Okada Riders/Owners Association (Non Indigenes), Lagos State. In this interview with **EJIKEME OMENAZU**, he speaks on the rising cost of fuel among other issues of national importance. Excerpt:



Aguh

Look at the cost of cement and other commodities he is interested in. Their prices have always been on the increase. However, I think the government should subsidise what Dangote Refinery is producing so that it can sell fuel cheaper to Nigerians. The government officials and the NNPC have been using the turn-around maintenance of the nation's four moribund refineries to dupe and siphon funds from the government. They have been making promises after promises, which they have not been able to keep. Let the government subsidise the production of fuel produced by Dangote so he can give Nigerians fuel at cheaper prices.

**How do you see government policies under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration? From your experience, would you say the policies are in public interest considering the hunger and suffering in the land?**

From Day One of this administration, its policies have not been in the interest of the masses. From the removal of subsidies, the value of the Naira to the Dollar, and the treatment of peaceful protesters who they treat as treasonable felons, arrest and detention of minors and charging them for treason, President Tinubu's policies have not been in the interest

of the masses. There are killings everyday as insecurity has been on the increase. There is food insecurity and high cost of the available food items. There is no joy or happiness in the country. The people are hungry and suffering. There is no development. Only politicians, Pastors and General Overseers are building mansions and buying a series of exotic cars. If the government pushes the people to the wall, the reactions of the masses may become uncontrollable than what they think. I can recall some of the promises of the APC during their campaigns. Let me remind them of some of them. "This government will bring down the fuel to N500 or thereabout." People were campaigning for them because they had started bringing things down. They said: "If we elect them again, they will bring fuel to N200. Dollar will come down to N300." This is the secret of Nigerian politicians, because they know that Nigerians do not remember. I advise Nigerians to be wise before the next election.

**How would you react to the request of President Tinubu to the National Assembly for the approval of N1,77 trillion (or \$2.2 Billion) foreign loan to fund the budget?**

It is very unfair. Under one and

half years they have borrowed more than what the country borrowed since independence. I am sorry I say that we do not have a National Assembly. They have never debated anything from the Presidency. They always pass everything from the president on voice vote where "the Ayes have it." The National Assembly should have rejected this latest loan request. Nigerians have a lot of revenue sources. These include crude oil, gold and several other solid minerals in the North which are mined by individuals. The government should take over all the solid minerals as they took over crude oil. The Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) is making trillions of Naira. Whatever they think they are making money for the country when in the real sense, they are killing Nigerians because whatever they make through import charges are added to the cost of goods and services. A bag of rice now is between N80,000 and N100,000. This is the angle that the people should look into to reduce the amount used to clear goods and give free duty to rice importers. The locally produced rice is never enough. That is why the prices are very high. Back to the foreign loans, Nigeria should end this tradition of foreign indebtedness. It is believed that whenever these loans are taken, they are channeled into private accounts of individuals or are stolen while the nation's debt profile continues to rise.

**Looking at challenges facing this nation under this administration, how will you trace the root causes?**

I think Atiku Abubakar should be blamed for the problems of this country. During Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential conventions, he spent over N10 million to buy one delegate to win the primary. After winning the ticket, he will not fund the campaigns again. If Atiku was able to fund

the presidential campaigns, the PDP would not have been losing to the APC. I don't envy President Tinubu because he worked for his position. He spent a lot of money when his party was in the opposition and did everything to ensure that the APC won the presidency for General Buhari and himself. Atiku, on his own, was nowhere to be found as an opposition leader. He will come again in 2027 to collect the PDP ticket. He cannot organise protests. He cannot meet labour unions. He cannot consult with transporters or market leaders to organise protests as Tinubu did during Jonathan's time. Atiku as PDP leader has not been able to work for the removal or suspension of Nyesom Wike. Rather, he is afraid of Wike. That was why he could not pick Wike as his running mate. As the PDP presidential candidate, he is still the Leader of the party. But Wike has continued to make noise because there is no man in PDP. That is why he has been using Rivers State money to control the party. So, Atiku should bury himself in shame. He should forget about ruling Nigeria.

**How do you see the emergence of M.C. Oluomo as the National Road Transporters Workers Union (NRTWU) National President?**

M.C. Oluomo worked for it. He deserves it. He merited it. I am in support of his being the president. He put his life on the line for Tinubu to become president. How many of those fighting for the position did what he did? When one work, he should be commended. Tinubu is rewarding him for what he did. I advise those in court over the position to withdraw their case.

**How do you see the future of this country?**

With the current leadership of this country, I do not see any future for this country. From the day the Supreme Court annulled the election of Chief Emeka Ihedioha as the Imo State governor, to the Supreme Court rulings on Godswill Akpabio and Ahmed, the courts which are the hope of the common man have now become a cash cow for judges. The burial of this country will come when this government succeeds in giving houses to judges which Wike is building for them in Abuja. This is when the opposition should ensure that this does not happen. When we cannot protest; we do not have labour leaders; we do not have the opposition. Now, we do not have justice. Nigeria's future name is 'Sorry'.

**How is Imo State in this second term of Governor Hope Uzodimma?**

There is no hope. One of my brothers who copied from his friend's examination paper, when they called his friend's result and said he failed, the man said there is no hope for himself as long as the person he copied from had failed. There is no hope for Imo State. I think the Owerri Zone should work hard to get a replacement for Governor Hope Uzodimma in the next governorship election.

**We (okada operators) are being treated as foreigners in our country. The state task force is everywhere pursuing our people in the streets. They extort huge amounts from us**

## POLITICS

# State Capture, Corruption, President Obasanjo's Salvo: How Tinubu's Media Team Goofed

BISHOP JOSEPH IGHALO EDORO, Edo State-born cleric and public affairs analyst in this piece for Sunday Independent, writes on the recent verbal attacks by President Bola Tinu's media team against former President Olusegun Obasanjo, which he describes as unnecessary, even as indicates that the Presidency has a lot to learn from the Elder Statesman.

Permit me to say that spokespersons in the Presidency or state governments should know that PR practice has become more refined and scientific in its practice and therefore should move with pace of dynamism and contemporary dynamics of the trade. If you must sell your principal, it must be persuasive and not coercive. You will be doing your principal or organ of government to engage in confrontation and calumnies, rather than persuasion. People want to see your views about what actions were taken or said about your principal and to see how you respond to it and convince them. This confrontational theory of rejoinder is a clue to clueless spokespersons. Take a cue from Police spokespersons. They are highly polite and persuasive.

Anyway, having said that, let me come to the main issue. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo is a three-time president (first as a military Head of State and two-term elected president), elder statesman, theologian and more. Highly respected all over the world, that he made a submission and it is eliciting so much brouhaha from a calibrated section amazes me.

Obasanjo is not small and should not be treated as such over his position. We have a right of reply and not a right of insult. No, on this one, I disagree. Not with a man of such status.

Now, let us look at what angered a few. At the presentation at YALE University during a lecture in commemoration of the works and times of our own late literary legend, Professor Chinua Achebe, Obasanjo had presented and posited that Nigeria was experiencing what an organ of the UN and Transparency International calls STATE CAPTURE, the bedrock of which is corruption.

For the interest of those who missed the original story, this is how Sunday Independent captured what the former President said on Sunday November 17, 2024: "Obasanjo Decries State Capture Under President Tinubu

...Says Nigeria's Failed Status Now Glaring

Ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo has no kind words for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu as he slams him over the socio-economic crisis in the country under his watch.

The former president became acerbic on Saturday in faraway USA when he insisted that what is happening in Nigeria today is state capture in the administration of President Tinubu whom he describes as "Baba-go-slow and Emi lo kan."

Obasanjo dropped the bombshell, according to a statement by his media aide, Kehinde Akinyemi, while delivering a keynote address at the Chinua Achebe Leadership Forum, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA, on Saturday (November 16, 2024).

According to the statement, "The more the immorality and corruption of a nation, the more the nation



Tinubu



Edoro



Obasanjo

sinks into chaos, insecurity, conflict, discord, division, disunity, depression, youth restiveness, confusion, violence, and underdevelopment.

"Nigeria situation: As we can see and understand, Nigeria's situation is bad. The more the immorality and corruption of a nation, the more the nation sinks into chaos, insecurity, conflict, discord, division, disunity, depression, youth restiveness, confusion, violence, and underdevelopment. That's the situation mostly in Nigeria in the reign of 'Baba-go-slow' and 'Emi lo kan'.

"The failing state status of Nigeria is confirmed and glaringly indicated and manifested for every honest person to see through the consequences of the level of our pervasive corruption, mediocrity, immorality, misconduct, mismanagement, perversion, injustice, incompetence and all other forms of iniquity. But yes, there is hope."

While quoting from Chinua Achebe's *The Trouble with Nigeria* published in 1983, it said: "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character:

"There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership."

He continued: "In hindsight, this 41-year-old prescriptive analysis on the root causes of Nigeria's leadership crisis is quite moderate and appropriate.

"It is at least not as desolate as the diagnosis provided by Robert Rotberg and John Campbell, two prominent US intellectuals – the latter a former United States Ambassador to Nigeria to boot: 'Nigeria has long teetered on the precipice of failure,' they argue. 'Unable to keep its citizens safe and secure, Nigeria has become a fully failed state of critical geo-political concern.

"Its failure matters because the

peace and prosperity of Africa and preventing the spread of disorder and militancy around the globe depend on a stronger Nigeria."

He described state capture "as one of the most pervasive forms of corruption, a situation where powerful individuals, institutions, companies, or groups within or outside a country use corruption to shape a nation's policies, legal environment, and economy, to benefit their own private interests."

He added: "State capture is not always overt and obvious. It can also arise from the more subtle close alignment of interests between specific business and political elites through family ties, friendships, and the intertwined ownership of economic assets.

"What is happening in Nigeria – right before our eyes – is state capture: The purchase of national assets by political elites – and their family members – at bargain prices, the allocation of national resources – minerals, land, and even human resources – to local, regional, and international actors. It must be prohibited and prevented through local and international laws.

"Public institutions such as the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, and regulatory agencies both at the federal and local levels are subject to capture.

"As such, state capture can broadly be understood as the disproportionate and unregulated influence of interest groups or decision-making processes, where special interest groups manage to bend state laws, policies, and regulations.

"They do so through practices such as illicit contributions paid by private interests to political parties, and for election campaigns, vote buying, buying of presidential decrees or court decisions, as well as through illegitimate lobbying and revolving door appointments.

"The main risk of state capture is that decisions no longer take into consideration the public interest, but instead favour a specific special interest group or individual.

"Laws, policies, and regulations are designed to benefit a specific interest group, oftentimes to the detriment of smaller firms and groups and society in general. State capture can seriously affect economic development, regulatory quality, the provision of public services, quality of education and health services, infrastructure decisions, and even the environment and public health."

Now, this I guess is the bone of disagreement between a selected few. There is a right to everyone's opinion. I have read the entire speech and find it helpful if we can also take a cue from the solutions proffered.

These trajectories should not lead us to another media conundrum. For Obasanjo, we have experienced so far leadership failures and corruption and it would need a revisiting of our constitution, our political integrity, ballot defence, foreign election interference, avoiding electoral violence and more, compromised judiciary and then quoted the definition of State Capture. That's fine. That is his view. He cannot absolve his tenure though he may try. But, these views must not be shut down or repressed by a hollow media team. I strongly disagree. Government must learn to welcome criticism. This is the beauty of governance and democracy. It should not be a fight all the time. And the modus of these media teams is worrisome. Who told them that they must issue forth confrontational rejoinders always? There is a culture and it is that you must look at the status of the person you are issuing a rejoinder against and mind your language. No matter what you are talking about an ex-president, these media boys are too infinitesimal to do a rejoinder on such a figure.

What I am saying is that looking at the paper report, I see a lot this government can learn from it and institute good from. Overall speaking, can Obasanjo exonerate himself? Was he trying to exonerate his tenure and can he? These are left for

us the public to evaluate.

There is exigency in relation to the contingencies of contemporary Nigeria. The days are turning to darkness faster than expected. All must come on board and avoid bickering and jaw-jaw that do no good. The government will not be seen as weak, but stronger when it calls for help and support from Nigerians. This is what we need now. The issues we face today are not today's issues, yet we must galvanise help from all to solve our problems. It's not a time to blame the government, nor is it a time for the government to be confrontational to its people and critics. Corruption in Nigeria did not start in the Tinubu administration. It may be thriving, so he is empowering the EFCC more. If the President does not know that corruption must be fought, I am sure he would have disbanded the EFCC.

My take is: Government agencies and its agents should allow Nigerians the freedom to suggest ways to improve on what this government is doing. Funny enough, these ideas can only come from criticism which gives birth to better solutions.

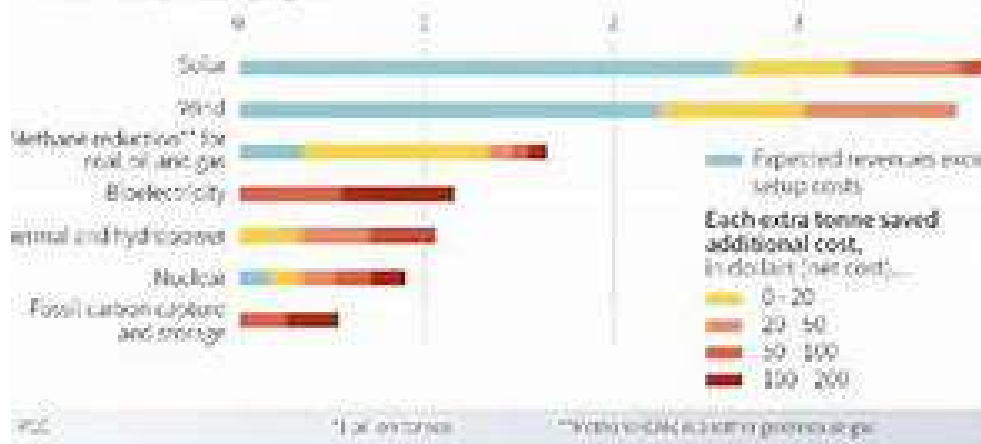
My point is this, that this is a just presentation by President Olusegun Obasanjo and should be given accolades and attention. We should not be perfunctory about it. It is a clarion call. It is not one to confront, but proffer, if we must follow through with the Renewed Hope Agenda which encapsulates all sectors of our daily life. This present administration has originated more germane policies since inception, more than any administration and these policies meet with global standards. They may have hiccups, yet they stand well. The deduction is that it is a willing-to-learn government and very globally compliant.

Lastly, I will advise that the media team of BAYO ONANUGA, SUNDAY DARE and DANIEL BWALLA to be more contemporary in their PR duties and sell their Principal and his beautiful ideas for the people, rather than been confrontational, inflammatory and lack lustre.

# Expensive Climate Policy Is Dead And It Could Be An Immense Opportunity

## Energy: the costs of solutions for limiting climate change

Global contribution to the net reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, in tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per year



World failing dangerously short of climate goals



unchecked climate change going stupendously expensive

### BJORN LOMBORG

The latest climate summit has been as hypocritical and dysfunctional as everyone before, with most world leaders not even bothering to turn up.

Still, 50,000 people flew in from across the world, while essentially telling the rest of us to stop flying.

Poor-country politicians performatively staged a “walk-out”, and rich nations ended up promising a climate slush fund of \$300 billion a year.

This extravagant pay-off is unlikely to happen, just like previous fanciful pledges made over three decades of climate summits.

While virtually every summit has promised to cut emissions, they’ve increased almost every year, and 2024 reached a new high.

In 2021, the world promised to phase-down coal. Since then, global coal consumption has only gone up.

We need a different gameplan—and the decisive election of Donald Trump may upend these sanctimonious summits. Therein lies an opportunity for the world.

Carbon emissions continue to grow because cheap, reliable power, mostly from fossil fuels, drives economic growth.

Wealthy countries like the US and European Union members have started to cut emissions but the rest of the world remains focused on eradicating poverty.

The rich world has tried to bribe the poor to agree to emission cuts, mainly by rebranding existing development aid.

Unsurprisingly, rich countries paying lip service to the pay-offs has led to poor countries paying lip service to the climate pageantry, while actually driving economic growth with ever-more fossil fuels.

Promising hundreds of bil-

lions extra, which the rich world can ill afford, just means more pretending from both sides.

Green campaigners insist that the global transition away from fossil fuels is unstoppable, yet over the past decade and even just last year, fossil fuel energy has increased twice as much as green energy.

Even the Biden Administration’s Energy Information Administration expects fossil fuels to increase all the way to 2050.

Green politicians insist solar and wind are cheaper than fossil fuels, but this is only true when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing.

In reality, such renewables need massive subsidies and redistributive taxes, which has driven up electricity costs in the EU by 50% since 2000, now costing each person over \$300 extra annually.

The reality is most countries in the world don’t want to emulate virtue-signaling nations like Germany, which has hiked energy prices, sacrificed industry and given up on economic growth for the sake of green energy.

Despite economic hardships like its first two-year recession, on current trends it will take Germany half a millennium to entirely stop using fossil fuels.

Recent years have seen politicians promising feverishly to cut even more carbon—but the election of Donald Trump, who campaigned on pulling out of the Paris Agreement and scrapping renewable energy projects, means this bubble is bursting.

And these troubles began even before Trump’s election. Despite an exuberant stock market in recent years, clean energy shares have lost half their value.

After the US election, they immediately tumbled further, based on the expectation that subsidy spigots will be turned off in the US.

**Unsurprisingly, rich countries paying lip service to the pay-offs has led to poor countries paying lip service to the climate pageantry, while actually driving economic growth with ever-more fossil fuels.**

The “net zero” green agenda, based on massive subsidies and expensive legislation, will likely cost \$27 trillion per year across the century, making it utterly unattractive to most nations.

Trump will dump these policies. Without huge transfers of wealth, China, India and many other growing, developing countries will in effect disavow these policies, too.

This leaves a rag-tag group mostly from the EU, which can scarcely afford their own policies but have no ability to pay off everyone else.

Fortunately, there is a much better and cheaper way to tackle climate change.

Climate economists have long shown that investment in green energy R&D is the most efficient approach.



Bjorn Lomborg

For just a tiny fraction of current, inefficient green spending, we could quintuple global green innovation to drive down the price of new technologies like better batteries and fourth-generation nuclear.

Innovating the price of green energy below fossil fuels is the only way to get everyone to switch.

This approach can even help convince policymakers who are skeptical about climate change because they see the vast potential in cheaper energy.

A dose of realism could also end the elite’s singular preoccupation with climate.

The rich world faces many challenges: rapid aging, an urgent need for pension reform, growing healthcare costs, flatlining education results, and more military threats.

The trillions wasted on current climate policies could be much better spent.

For the world’s poorer half, problems of poverty, hunger, easily curable infectious diseases, and corruption need more attention, and they have incredibly cheap and effective solutions.

Instead of the immense, and mostly poorly spent, climate bribes, this money could boost development across the global south.

Climate campaigners can spend the next four years doubling down on policies that have failed for the past three decades and protesting the Trump Administration for its policy shift. Or they can use the opportunity to refocus on a smarter and much cheaper green innovation policy—and address all the other urgent problems facing the world.

*Bjorn Lomborg is President of the Copenhagen Consensus, Visiting Fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, and author of “False Alarm” and “Best Things First”.*

## Business

# Experts Want Nigerians To Curb Consumption Of SSB In Interest Of Public Health, Environment

Health and climate experts have identified the sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) industry as a major driver of the climate crisis, urging Nigeria to implement measures to curb their consumption in the interest of public health and the environment.

Speaking on Friday at a webinar titled, "SSB and Climate Change: Climate Cost of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages," organised by the Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA), they warned that excessive sugary drinks consumption is not only a risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), but that the single-use plastics (SUPs) favoured as packaging by the SSB industry emit greenhouse gases (GHG) alongside toxic pollutants that threaten human safety and food security.

To curb the problem, they advocated implementing an improved, effective and pro-health SSB Tax, the proceeds of which can be channelled towards

strengthening the health sector to better cater for NCD patients.

Akinbode Oluwafemi, CAPPA's Executive Director, noted the webinar's significance adding that it is coming at the end of the Climate Change Conference COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

"The use of plastics by soda companies has been a significant contributor to climate change and Coca-Cola, for instance, has been named the world's top plastic polluter followed by PepsiCo," Oluwafemi added.

Public health expert and lecturer at the University of Ibadan Dr. Francis Fagbule, warned of the dangers of excessive SSB consumption, saying it could result in NCDs – non-infectious long-term health consequences that often create a need for long-term treatment and care, such as lung Diseases, Cardiovascular Diseases, Cancer, and Type 2 Diabetes, among others.

On the focus on SSBs despite other risk factors for NCDs, Fagbule explained that SSBs are among the leading sources of free sugars, and they contain little to

no added nutritional value.

He noted that the SSB industry spends billions on marketing and advertising to attract consumers despite being aware of the health consequences of their products.

Fagbule added: "Increase in SSB consumption leads to increase in NCDs, so we need to decrease SSB consumption and the SSB Taxation is one of the best ways to achieve this.

"There is incontrovertible evidence linking SSB consumption and hypertension, even among adolescents and children.

"Studies show that SSBs may pose greater health risks, including the risk of metabolic syndrome, compared to sugar-containing solid foods."

CAPPA's Senior Programmes Manager and Head of its Climate Change Programme, Olamide Martins Ogunlade, highlighted the health implications associated with plastic waste while emphasizing the need for urgent action.

Speaking on the topic "Plastic Climate Change: Establishing the Nexus, Counting the Costs",

Ogunlade shared data showing that 40 per cent of the plastics produced worldwide have been traced to food and beverage packaging – typically used once and then discarded.

"Not only are single-use plastics warming the planet, but they are also impairing our environment and physical health. As plastics are discarded into the environment, they eventually break into microplastics that can leach toxic additives. These microplastics accumulate in commercially harvested fish, enters drinking water supplies, and seep into agricultural soils, altering food crops.

"Worst still, these SUPs now host and provide brands to most of the sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) in town, increasing the potency of their anticipated damage," Ogunlade said.

He warned that exposure to toxic chemicals and microplastics through inhalation and ingestion can lead to serious health issues, including cancer and endocrine disruption, potentially affecting reproductive and cognitive functions.

## USAID Partners Ascend Studios To Strengthen Nigeria's Creative Industry

The United States government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), declared its latest strategic partnership with Ascend Studios, a creative-industry organization providing capacity building, mentorship, social, educational, and economic empowerment to women and youth to propel Nigeria's creative sector.

This partnership will catalyse additional funding to strengthen Nigeria's burgeoning Nollywood industry with additional partners including Paramount Nigeria, Venture Garden Group, and renowned music executive Ralph Simon.

Labeled the Africa Creative Blueprint, this strategic partnership will strengthen Nigerian youth with the skills and resources needed to compete in the creative industry and also elevate Nigerian creatives to the international stage.

USAID Nigeria Mission Director Melissa Jones remarked, "The U.S. government is eager to enhance Nigeria's capacity as a leading player in the creative economy and encourage global partnerships. This partnership will create a stream of high-quality, commercially viable content that can compete on the world stage."

While Nigeria's film industry has achieved global recognition, it faces structural challenges that hinder its full economic and creative potential. Key areas for improvement include expanding film distribution channels, enhancing production quality through advanced equipment, developing stronger screenwriting and story development practices, and reinforcing intellectual property protections.

Addressing these gaps would enable the creative sector to capture a broader audience and support more sustainable revenue

streams for filmmakers.

To address these challenges, USAID teamed up with the Nigerian and American private sectors to launch the Africa Creative Blueprint.

At the core of the collective \$3.5 million investment, the Africa Creative Blueprint will provide intensive training skills in TV production to 3,500 Nigerian youth, and develop a skilled TV workforce of at least 200 youth to create a high-quality, music-infused 13-episode TV drama.

The TV drama will be a powerful medium to convey social messages, promote positive change, and foster inclusive growth and equitable opportunity in Nigeria.

The training will take place across six Nigerian cities—Lagos, Abuja, Enugu, Kano, Benin, and Asaba—ensuring wide-reaching access to this unique development opportunity.

The Africa Creative Blueprint is now accepting applications for the training program and cast/crew member employment.

The programme will select from directors, writers, producers, production coordinators/managers, editors, production designers, cinematographers, costumiers, assistant directors, actors/actresses, composers, sound designers, lawyers, accountants, and production finance professionals (including sales agents).

"We are honored to be selected as the recipient of USAID funding," said Inya Lawal, CEO of Ascend Studios.

"This collaboration represents a milestone for the Nigerian creative sector and opens opportunities for us to elevate African stories on a global platform. Through this initiative, we are building the infrastructure needed to develop world-class creative talent capable of transforming the industry



L-R: Idris Ibrahim Group Executive, Retail Banking North, FirstBank; Shehu Aliyu, Executive Director, Public Sector, FirstBank; Folake Anim-Mumuney, Group Head, Marketing & Corporate Communications, FirstBank; Ini Ebong, Deputy Managing Director, FirstBank; Wu Guohua, Deputy General of International Corporation III, China Development Bank; Olusegun Alebiosu, Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer, FirstBank; Wang Weidong, Vice President, China Development Bank; Aliyu Modibbo Umar, representative of Kashim Shettima, the Vice President of Nigeria and Ebenezer Olufowose, Chairman, FirstBank at the China Africa Inter-Bank Association (CAIBA) Forum hosted by FirstBank, in Abuja recently.

## Interswitch Group Sponsors CEBIH 2024 Conference, Collaborates To Foster Payment System Vision 2030

Interswitch Group, one of the leading integrated payments and digital commerce company in Africa, has been unveiled as key Sponsor of the Committee of e-Business Industry Heads (CeBIH) 2024 Conference.

Scheduled for December 4th to 5th 2024, at the Eko Convention Centre, Victoria Island, Lagos, the conference will explore the theme "Payment System Vision 2030: Navigating Contemporary Issues in Driving Future Growth."

CeBIH is made up of top-tier electronic business practitioners from all banks in Nigeria, with the primary objective of promoting electronic banking services that align with global best practices.

The CeBIH 2024 Conference will play a pivotal role in advancing the goals of Payment System Vision (PSV) 2030 by evaluating progress, highlighting key milestones, and addressing challenges within the payment ecosystem.

The PSV 2030 is a strategic

framework developed by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to guide the evolution of the country's payment systems over the next decade. Building on the success of previous initiatives like the Payment System Vision 2020, PSV 2030 aims to further advance financial inclusion, drive innovation in the payments sector, and support the broader digital economy in Nigeria.

In anticipation of a keynote address titled "The Impact of Globalization and the Gig Economy on Inclusive Payment Systems in Nigeria" to be delivered by Mitchell Elegbe, Founder and Group Managing Director, Interswitch, he remarked.

"We are proud to support CeBIH and the 2024 CeBIH annual conference as it aligns perfectly with our vision of building seamless, secure, and future-ready payment systems for Africa. This partnership highlights Interswitch's commitment to drive

innovation and advance the payments ecosystem. Together, we aim to address the evolving challenges in digital payments and contribute to the development of a robust, inclusive, and sustainable digital economy across Africa."

The CeBIH 2024 conference will explore the role of technology and innovation in driving digital financial inclusion while fostering dialogue and collaboration between financial institutions, fintech companies, and regulators. The conference will also generate policy recommendations aimed at creating a supportive environment for the growth and sustainability of Nigeria's payment ecosystem.

Furthermore, this year's event will bring together thought leaders, industry experts, and policymakers to explore strategies that will shape the future of payments in Nigeria and beyond. It will also feature engaging keynote speeches, panel discussions, and inter-

active sessions designed to drive meaningful outcomes.

Interswitch's sponsorship of the 2024 CeBIH annual conference underlines its ongoing commitment to drive innovation and shape the future of payments in Nigeria. By supporting this impactful event, Interswitch continues to play a key role in advancing digital financial inclusion, promoting collaboration among key stakeholders and fostering the development of a robust and sustainable payment ecosystem.

As Nigeria moves towards achieving the objectives of PSV 2030, Interswitch continues to play a key role in the financial ecosystem, working alongside industry leaders to ensure that Africa's payment systems evolve to meet the dynamic needs of its people. Interswitch will continue to lead the way in driving a seamless, secure, and inclusive digital economy for Nigeria and beyond.

## IBEDC Fights Energy Thieves With Special Investigative And Prosecution Task Force

MOHAMMED SHOSANYA  
LAGOS

The Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC) Plc has ramped up its efforts against energy theft across its network.

Partnering with the Special Investigation and Prosecution Task Force on Electricity Offences (SIPETO), IBEDC is committed to identifying, investigating, and prosecuting individuals involved in energy theft.

Engr. Francis Agoha, Acting Managing Director/CEO, emphasised the company's zero-tolerance stance on energy theft, highlighting the severe consequences for offenders.

"Energy theft is a significant challenge that impacts our ability to provide reliable service to our customers. We are intensifying our efforts through partnerships like this to ensure that those who engage in such practices face the full force of the law," Engr. Agoha stated.

Between January and October 2024, IBEDC recorded over 8,000 cases of energy theft, including meter bypass and illegal meter tampering, resulting in financial losses totaling hundreds of millions of naira.

Engr. Agoha stressed the importance of the ongoing collaboration with SIPETO: "Our partnership with the Special Investigation and Prosecution Task Force is crucial. It not only enhances our capacity to detect and prosecute offenders but also sends a strong message that energy theft will not be tolerated. This undermines the integrity of our operations and deprives us of resources needed to improve service delivery."

IBEDC urges customers to refrain from any form of energy theft, warning of the severe penalties, including imprisonment, as stipulated under the Electricity Act. The company assures customers that SIPETO patrols are active and vigilant, investigating reported cases thoroughly.

# The Trump Administration's China Challenge

## Rebuilding American Strength Will Take Buy-In at Home and Abroad—and From Trump Himself

RUSH DOSHI

Predicting the incoming Trump administration's China policy—and China's likely response—is a guessing game. In his first term as president, Donald Trump's transactional approach often differed from his team's competitive approach. Those contrasting impulses will define his second term. But despite the uncertainty surrounding the Trump administration's approach, the central challenge it faces is clear: positioning the United States to outcompete China as a critical window in the competition begins to close.

Early in the Biden administration, senior officials got together, read the intelligence, and concluded that the 2020s would be the decisive decade in U.S. competition with China. Without corrective action, the United States faced a growing risk of being surpassed by China technologically, dependent on it economically, and defeated militarily in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait.

The new Trump team will take the United States through the second half of the decisive decade. There is much to be done. Trump's national security picks, particularly Mike Waltz as national security adviser, Marco Rubio as secretary of state, and Elise Stefanik as ambassador to the United Nations, understand the task ahead and have views consistent with a growing bipartisan consensus on the need to outcompete China. Their most significant obstacle in carrying out a competitive approach may be Trump's own penchant for dealmaking, transactionalism, and flattery toward President Xi Jinping, which sometimes undercut his staff's more hard-line approaches, including the expansion of export controls and a vocal defense of human rights, among other measures, the first time around.

If Trump's new team can overcome that challenge, they will have an opportunity to improve America's competitive position. Closing the gap during the decisive decade may call for building on the work of President Joe Biden, just as the Biden team built on the work of the Trump administration. The Biden administration focused on rebuilding American strength by focusing on its foundations at home and its relationships with partners abroad, an approach summed up in its "invest, align, compete" tagline. That formula can also serve as a way to fulfill the Trump administration's vision of "peace through strength." But rebuilding American power will require the Trump administration to undertake new efforts, too, that depend on bipartisan congressional support and the buy-in of the American public.

### Strength Starts At Home

Some of the most urgent questions about U.S. China policy turn on questions about domestic policy, which provides the basis for American strength. But the foundations of that strength have atrophied, especially since the end of the Cold War. The administration will need to undertake significant structural reforms to remedy these weaknesses.

The United States needs to fix its defense industrial base to rapidly deter China and, if necessary, defeat it in a potential conflict. At present, the United States would expend all its munitions within a week of sustained fighting and would struggle to rebuild surface vessels after they were sunk, with a national shipbuilding capacity less than that of one of China's larger shipyards. The Trump administration must focus on



Trump

making progress on two timelines: the two-year problem of fielding more uncrewed systems and cruise and ballistic missiles in the Indo-Pacific, as well as the five-to-ten-year problem of revitalizing the United States' shipbuilding industry, which has been declining for decades without an adequate commercial sector to keep it viable.

Washington also needs to protect its critical infrastructure from cyberattack. China has compromised U.S. critical infrastructure on which millions of Americans rely, including water and gas, transportation, and telecommunications systems, with the aim of inciting chaos, sowing panic, and reducing U.S. will in a conflict scenario. As it invests in offensive capabilities, the Trump administration will also need to bolster American defenses through a combination of regulatory measures, new legislation holding companies accountable for lackluster cyberdefenses, and novel technical efforts that can complicate the abilities of bad actors to penetrate U.S. networks.

Finally, the United States needs to invest in reindustrialization and technological leadership. China already accounts for more than 30 percent of global manufacturing, can innovate successfully, increasingly leads in the sectors of tomorrow, and is redirecting massive amounts of capital into manufacturing as its housing market stagnates. The result, a second "China shock" akin to the one that flooded U.S. markets with cheap Chinese goods at the beginning of this century, will threaten the United States' future as an industrial power and leave it more dependent on China than China is on the United States. Addressing this problem will require not only tariffs but also industrial policies to stimulate manufacturing and high-tech industry and coordination with allies and partners. Punitive measures directed at allies, such as tariffs, will complicate the United States' ability to enlist them in efforts to protect against China's excess capacity.

To advance this domestic agenda, the Trump administration cannot rely only on executive branch authorities. It will need significant bipartisan congressio-

academia, and the corporate sector behind the administration's efforts.

### Strength In Numbers

The China challenge is in part about scale. China is four times the size of the United States in population. It is the world's leading industrial state and the largest trading partner of over 100 countries. For the United States to compete, it needs to achieve scale of its own. The best path to rivaling China's size will run through allies and partners.

American strength flows from the country's rich network of alliances and partnerships. In addition to fixing structural problems at home, the Trump administration will need to deepen its coordination with friendly countries in two key areas: economics and technology, and security.

To avoid a second China shock and create conditions conducive to reindustrialization, the administration will need to pool allies' and partners' markets and align with them on tariff and regulatory approaches that protect Western industry. And to retain leadership in technology, it will need to cooperate on export controls to prevent sensitive technology from falling into China's hands.

To deter China's aggression in the Taiwan Strait or the South China Sea, the Trump administration should build on the Biden administration's collaborative successes in the region, which included AUKUS, a trilateral security partnership to provide Australia with nuclear submarine capability; the Quad, which brought the United States, Australia, India, and Japan together; and efforts to diversify the footprint of U.S. military forces across Australia, Japan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and elsewhere. The latter measure blunted the risk China's missile systems pose to U.S. forces near China and allowed the United States to operate more flexibly and resiliently. Deterrence also calls for providing allies and partners with asymmetric capabilities through arms sales and by positioning U.S. capabilities on their soil, as the United States recently did by deploying the Typhon missile system in the Philippines, in order to create costs for Chinese aggression. And finally, it almost certainly will require working with allies and partners to increase the economic and political costs for China's adventurism in Asia, including through coordinated sanctions and statements in response to Chinese military activity. None of these steps are possible if the United States goes it alone.

Whether the Trump administration is able to achieve cooperation on these priorities depends on how they approach allies and partners. European leaders, for good reason, fear that Trump will levy tariffs on European countries' economies, cut military assistance to Ukraine, pressure Europe to increase defense spending, and possibly pursue its own form of détente with Russia in the hope that increased U.S. engagement could weaken the Chinese-Russian relationship. Administration officials should use their leverage over European countries to bring about a broader realignment in the transatlantic relationship, one that ensures that Europe bolsters its defenses, increases support for Ukraine, and imposes tougher economic and technological measures on China, such as on export controls, in coordination with the United States. This approach would be wiser than pushing for a package of immediate and flashy short-term concessions that would damage alliances without realigning them meaningfully. Similarly, in Asia, Trump's first-term

threats to withdraw U.S. troops from allied countries, demand more payment for U.S. bases, or abandon U.S. defense commitments were grounded in real U.S. leverage. But they ignored the fact that American allies in the region must attend to their own domestic political situations, in which voters often react negatively to public pressure from the United States. A subtle approach to enlist them in the administration's China strategy will be more effective.

### Threats, Bluffs, And Promises

Beijing, for its part, is already taking steps to prepare for the incoming administration. It is deeply concerned about Trump's threat to levy 60 percent tariffs on Chinese goods and has already signaled it is prepared to retaliate with tariffs, export controls, and sanctions of its own, as well as crackdowns on U.S. companies operating in China. If Chinese officials believe retaliation will provoke further escalation from Trump, they may be restrained, mirroring their behavior in the trade war during Trump's first term. If they believe, however, that retaliation may cause the Trump administration to back down for fear of rising inflation or risks to key American companies, then they are more likely to respond forcefully, perhaps even seeking to escalate to de-escalate, a tactic previewed by Beijing in its targeting of Micron, an American semiconductor manufacturer; and its recent use of export controls on rare earth elements in response to U.S. export controls. But there is a third possibility: if Trump levies a 60 percent tariff early in his presidency and shows limited interest in negotiation, and China concludes that the risks to its economy (and Xi's reputation) are existential and intolerable, then Beijing may have no choice but to respond forcefully, regardless of the expected American response.

It's unclear whether the Trump administration's tariff threat is a negotiating tactic intended to achieve a change in China's behavior; a nonnegotiable U.S. policy intended to achieve decoupling, or a mix of both. For Beijing, the best outcome may be to hope for the former and, through a mixture of retaliation and personal diplomacy, push for a bargain that might include trade, technology, and even counternarcotics measures. To increase the odds of such an outcome, Beijing may initially retaliate against companies with close ties to Trump, including Elon Musk's Tesla, in order to incentivize de-escalation. Chinese officials may also seek to split Trump from his more hard-line staff and play to his direct self-interest, as they did in negotiations following the start of the U.S.-Chinese trade war during his first term. Their strategy resulted in Trump downplaying China's crackdown against protesters in Hong Kong, expressing support for its internment camps in Xinjiang, offering to lift export controls on Huawei and ZTE, and even accepting a trade deal that did not address China's industrial policy practices. Given this history, the possibility that Beijing suggests a grand bargain to Trump in which semiconductor export controls and other would-be nonnegotiable U.S. policies, potentially including U.S. Taiwan policy, are negotiated directly with Beijing should particularly concern the administration's more competitively inclined staff. Such a proposal should be rejected.

*Continues in FOREIGN AFFAIRS (www.foreignaffairs.com), November 29, 2024.*

**The United States needs to fix its defense industrial base to rapidly deter China and, if necessary, defeat it in a potential conflict.**

nal support. The Biden administration approached some major domestic initiatives in this fashion, including through its infrastructure bill and the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Trump administration could do the same.

The Trump administration will also need to mobilize the American public. Since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, every American president has given a prime-time address from the Oval Office on some aspect of Middle East policy. None have done so on China. Trump may consider an address to the nation on China policy, but how he frames the nature of the competition with China will matter more than whether he delivers such a speech. With a clear-eyed but not demagogic tone, stressing competition but not necessarily confrontation, and linking competition with China directly to the interests of Americans, Trump could rally the American public, civil society,

## Global Trends

# Remembering The “Nuclear Winter Theory” As The World Draws Closer To A Conflagration

SENATOR ANTHONY AGBO

Today, the world is realistically on a delicate edge akin to the extremely dangerous situation of the Cuban Missile Crises of 1962, when nations held their breaths as the United States and the then Soviet Union were on the brink of imminent Thermo-nuclear War, arising from when the Soviet Union under Premier Nikita Khrushchev secretly deployed nuclear strike force in Cuba, just some 90 miles from the United States.

The emergence of BRICS as a counter global economic force to challenge several decades of American/Western economic domination, the terrifyingly dangerous scenario currently unfolding in the Russian-Ukraine war (which is a proxy war of the West against Russia), the Middle East conflict between Israel and Iran's militant proxies, America's threat hanging upon China over the sovereignty dispute between China and Taiwan, as well as the tension in the hyper-volatile Korean peninsula in which America is manifesting its vested interest; all combine to expressly attest to the veracity of the above stated fears.

A cogent and realistic fear exists that further escalation beyond the current critical state of affairs in the Russian-Ukrainian war could see the world staring at a nuclear confrontation between Russia and the West as Russia has repeatedly warned.

America and some western nations have recently given Ukraine the approval to strike inside Russia with western-supplied high-tech weapons as against the standing restriction to use such weapons only within Ukrainian territories where Russia is operating in. In response to this, Russia is already engaging in critical new manoeuvres against Ukraine involving Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, ICBM, capable of delivering nuclear war heads, while handing down warnings of a nuclear confrontation.

It is a well-known fact that the world nuclear power nations, particularly the two super powers of United States and Russia, already possess enough nuclear arsenal that can destroy the whole earth with every life form in it several times over. Out of these horrifying stock piles of horrendous instruments of mass deaths and total annihilation, Russia has 45.4% of the global total nuclear war heads, America has 42.7%, while China, France, UK, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea share the rest. Iran which is locked in mortal enmity with the State of Israel is strongly suspected to have conducted a nuclear test on 6th October, 2024 under the fog of the ongoing Middle East war. On this date, Iran had shut down their air space from 9:00pm to 6:00am and cancelled all flights out and into the country while the University



Antonio Guterres

of Teran at 10:45pm announced a 4.4 magnitude earthquake; all of which are consistent with underground nuclear test.

Among these nuclear powers, Russia is reputed to possess the single most powerful nuclear bomb ever produced. This bomb, named: Tsar Bomba, RDS - 220 Hydrogen bomb, first tested in 1961 in Novaya Island in the Arctic Ocean has a 100 megaton capacity which makes it, 7,600 times the destructive power of the US nuclear bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima during world war 2.

Upon all these, escalations are still building up, and tension swelling, and each party is still updating their weapons among the contending powers.

There is obvious consensus among informed minds that if there occurs an all-out nuclear confrontation between Russia and America (with her western allies), such nuclear war will end in either of two scenarios, namely: either that the most advanced nations of the world are mutually annihilated under the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction, MAD, or that the whole world is annihilated through the **nuclear winter theory** as was propounded by the celebrated American Astronomer, cosmologist and astrobiologist, **Carl Sagan (1934 - 1996)**.

From the ancient time, through the contemporary era; diverse cultures, ancient religious bodies of both pagan and non-pagan persuasions, clairvoyants, apocalyptic prophets, planetary catastrophists, cosmologists, anti-strategic weapons campaigners, eschatological scientists, world apex secret societies, and all manners

**A cogent and realistic fear exists that further escalation beyond the current critical state of affairs in the Russian-Ukrainian war could see the world staring at a nuclear confrontation between Russia and the West as Russia has repeatedly warned.**

of prescient enquirers have all ventured predictions, prophecies or prognostications, either to the total and final end of the world or to a severe cataclysmic event that will destroy nations and much greater portion of the human population.

Among these, peoples' minds will always solemnly remember the prophecies of the Holy Bible, the eschatological predictions of the medieval French Seer and Physician, Michael De Nostradamus, and those of the Hebrew holy books and ancient Jewish Rabbis, those of the Moslem mystics, the Qero Incas, the Hopi Indians, the Aztecs, the Hindu “holy” books, the ancient Mayans, the Buddhists and the Zoroastrians, the prophecies of the Roman Catholic Virgin Mary, the ancient Chinese Book of Changes - I Ching, the Mayan Long Count Calendar, the Doomsday Clock, and the Albert Einstein's theory of the **Vanishing Bee Colonies**.

The renowned 20th Century Physicist, and the author of the celebrated **Relativity Theory**, Albert Einstein had propounded the **Theory of The Vanishing Bee Colonies**. In this Einstein had stated that “If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would only have four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man”.

The **Doomsday Clock** was invented and maintained by the Board of Directors of the **Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists** at the University of Chicago, Illinois, since 1947. This clock was designed to monitor the destruction (end) of the world through nuclear explosions and other possible catastrophes. At

present, the Doomsday Clock is reading 90 seconds before midnight, indicating that global destruction is imminent, even more than it was during the Cuban missile Crises. Midnight in the parlance of the clock is the hour of the end, though its seconds is not same as the normal clock seconds.

What then is the **Nuclear Winter Theory**? The American astronomer, cosmologist and astrobiologist, Professor Carl Sagan (1934 - 1996) and his colleagues, at the height of the cold war between the United States and the USSR made a research to discover the global impact of a nuclear war in which substantial nuclear weapons are exploded by the contending powers. The result of this study gave rise to the so called, **Nuclear Winter Theory**. And this theory/study described the immediate and long term destructive and climate change devastation that would result from a major nuclear war in the world. It talked of unimaginable, horrifying, and horrendous blast damage, unbearable intense fire, heat and horrendous radiation across endless landscape. The swelling massive dust, black smoke and fierce wind released by the gigantic explosion will together rise into the atmosphere and create a thick blanket above the globe, which then will block out sunlight/all source of heat and cosmic illumination thereby creating endless darkness and dropping the global temperatures to sub-zero levels, with the ozone layer totally destroyed, all resulting in endless fearful darkness, extreme cold, devastating harmful radiation, hunger, famine, mass death and eventual extinction of life on earth. And this horrendous, abominable climatic condition will endure for several years. This is the condition the global powers in vying for the ownership and control of the world they did not create are toying with, in mass killings and destruction and in insatiable greed comparable to that of cosmic black holes, appropriating unto themselves all the resources made for all by the creator.

But there is a God who made the Heaven and Earth, and who created man and everything on earth; the Governor of the nations, who watches over all. And He is the God who raised and crowned ancient Babylon, Persia, Egypt and Rome, and later brought them down. And so shall all the great and mighty powers and empires of man reign and pass away. Their ends may be close.

*Senator Anthony Agbo, a writer and politician, is the author of 'Africa: The Glory, The Curse, The Remedy' and 'Governance Under Gross Limitations'. He is a former representative of Southeast on the Board of Independent Corrupt Practices & Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and represented Ebonyi North Senatorial District in the 6th Senate.*

# Can Man City End Winless Streak At Table Topping Liverpool?



**CHIBUIKE CHUKWU**  
 (WITH AGENCY REPORTS)

**M**anchester City will be looking to end a miserable six-game winless run in all competitions when they travel to Anfield for a challenging test against Premier League leaders, Liverpool, today.

The Citizens may have seen their five-game losing streak come to an end on Tuesday night, but they threw away a three-goal lead with less than 15 minutes remaining to draw 3-3 with Feyenoord in the Champions League.

Pep Guardiola's side, which has struggled with injuries for several weeks, have lost each of their last three Premier League games and have subsequently slipped eight points behind an

in-form Liverpool at the summit.

It is obviously true that Guardiola is facing a crisis at Manchester City in the eyes of many, and not since his first season in charge of the club back in 2016-17 has the Catalan coach been questioned in the way he is being right now.

Indeed, the Citizens have come under intense scrutiny after that astonishing collapse against Feyenoord in the Champions League on Tuesday night, throwing away a three-goal lead with less than 15 minutes remaining to draw 3-3 at the Etihad Stadium.

Man City's late capitulation against Feyenoord underlines the scale of the ongoing crisis within Guardiola's squad, who had previously suffered five consecutive defeats in all com-

petitions, including three successive losses in the Premier League.

A heavy 4-0 home defeat to Tottenham Hotspur last weekend leaves Man City eight points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool, who welcome a wounded and injury-plagued Citizens outfit to Anfield for an intriguing showdown on Sunday.

Man City are tasked with ending their winless run by securing maximum points against Liverpool at a stadium where they have celebrated just one victory in their last 21 top-flight visits.

On the other side, Arne Slot's side enter this contest in high spirits after beating Real Madrid 2-0 in the Champions League on Wednesday, and Man City expert, Steven McInerney,

from Esteemed Kompany has admitted that he is "absolutely dreading" Sunday's trip to Anfield amidst the Citizens' injury woes, their decline in form and several other "fundamental issues."

He said; "It's not impossible: Can Man City end winless run against 'lucky' Liverpool?"

"It's not impossible" for Man City to beat "lucky" Liverpool.

However, McInerney has claimed that "it's not impossible" for Guardiola's side to come away with a positive result, while he feels that Liverpool have had "luck on their side" in the Premier League, after they were gifted all three goals in a 3-2 comeback victory over basement club Southampton last weekend.

"I don't think Liverpool were that great against Southamp-

ton," McInerney told Sports Mole senior reporter Oliver Thomas prior to City's draw with Feyenoord.

"I know they won, and comfortably in terms of chances in the end, but they got a little bit lucky with it.

"They rode their luck a tiny bit there... comically bad from Alex McCarthy.

"I feel that Liverpool can be got at, and Man City can create chances against them. I think we will because Liverpool have still been conceding chances as good as they have been.

"Even as good as the goal difference is, [they have] the best defensive record, but they still have conceded chances. All that points towards a team that's very lucky right now, which is

## Sports

## "They Can Come Good At Anfield"

← CONTINUED FROM P27

annoying. They've got luck on their side."

Nevertheless, McNerney has acknowledged that Liverpool are "playing with confidence" and he is wary of the threat in-form players including Ryan Gravenberch, Curtis Jones and Mohamed Salah can pose to Man City, and he is therefore "fearing the worst" for Guardiola's defensively frail side.

McNerney has also shared his thoughts on the Premier League title race and whether defeat for Man City at Anfield would all but end their hopes of winning an unprecedented fifth successive top-flight crown this term.

But Pep Guardiola, the coach of Man City, has admitted a near impossible task of winning the title if they lose today's match against the table toppers

Guardiola was asked whether an 11-point gap – if City lose to Arne Slot's team – would be too much to overhaul even at this stage of the season. "Yeah, it's true," he replied.

"We're not thinking about winning or losing [the title], we are not in the situation to think about what is going to happen at the end of the season.

"If in the end we don't win, it's because we don't deserve it. We won it in the past because we deserved it."

Ilkay Gundogan corroborated his coach and when quizzed on whether the trip to Anfield is a must-win for the reigning Premier League champions, Gundogan said, "To stay in the title race probably yes, because 11 points would be a huge gap."

The German midfielder continued, "Anfield is always tough, no matter the situation. We've struggled in recent years going there. We know Liverpool are a great team full of confidence right now.

"It's going to be as tough as it is possible to be. But that sums up the situation right now."

Meanwhile, there has never been a better time for Liverpool



to face this City side. Liverpool, already eight points clear of the champions, have more reason to be confident going into a game against City than they have in any other recent meeting.

But they will also go into this top-of-the-table meeting wary of a backlash. It would be foolish to underestimate City, even on a six-game winless run that nobody could have seen coming a month ago.

There are justifiable reasons to predict just about any result on Sunday, in what will be Slot's first meeting with Guardiola. Here, we look at five key factors that could decide the game's

outcome.

With City's Soft Middle without Rodri in the midfield, City have been too easy to play through. That isn't entirely down to the absence of the 2024 Ballon d'Or winner, but it is a big part of the problem.

In Guardiola's entire reign, City have never looked so porous. Their problems at the back of late have been historically bad. Before the Feyenoord disaster, they have conceded at least two goals in six successive games in all competitions for the first time since May 1963.

As a team that dominates possession as much as they do,

counter-attacks are one of the few ways that opponents ever really have a chance against them. In Rodri's absence, opposition counters have become a real problem.

In the 10 Premier League matches that Rodri hasn't appeared in this season, Manchester City have given up 17 shots following a fast-break situation. In comparison, they have allowed opponents just seven shots from fast breaks in their last 10 matches with Rodri, and only one in their last eight.

But Liverpool coach, Arne Slot, has claimed City have played better than their results suggest and he is expecting a tough encounter on Sunday.

"I don't think anyone in the last eight or nine years - or even longer - would have said that City at home or away [is] easy," said Slot.

"Everybody is looking at their results. I've seen them as well. Against Brighton, they were 1-0 up, they could have scored for 2-0 or 3-0 but didn't. Then they got beaten 2-1.

"Against Tottenham, after 20 minutes they could have been two or three goals up, but they weren't. Against Feyenoord, that [losing a three-goal lead] has not happened many times. They were 3-0 up and then all of a sudden it was 3-3.

"They are still a very good team. One of the reasons why I think Pep is the best manager in the world is he always comes up with solutions."

Skysport reports that Slot admitted that the absence of Rodri might have been the reason for the dip in form, but trust Guardiola could come up with a solution before Sunday

"His problem now might be

that Rodri is out but we all know, at least I think, he will come up with a [solution and] that their form will come again - hopefully after Sunday.

"He [Guardiola] was the one who started playing with the inverted full-back, then he was the first one to play the centre-back as the No 6. I wouldn't be surprised if he came up with another idea nobody ever thought about before to make his team even stronger. That's the reason why he inspired so many managers around the world.

"When he came up with it, we thought it was crazy, but [then] we all went, 'Let's do the same, it's a brilliant idea'. I wouldn't be surprised if he comes up with something new again.

"But let's wait and see because many things have been done with football now. If there's anyone in this managerial world who can come up with something new, it's definitely him."

Asked why City have conceded so many late goals and why Liverpool have not, Slot replied: "Not playing Tottenham yet! Because they're a very good team with a great playing style.

"It always depends on the circumstances. Them conceding three against Feyenoord probably had a lot to do with the substitutions they made. If you saw the first and the second goal, the second goal the ball hit the post and then it fell to Santiago Gimenez.

"During the season these things can happen to every team. With Arsenal, [Martin] Odegaard being out didn't help them. Rodri being out didn't help City.



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# One-Month Doping Ban: 'Toughest Battle In My Life' – Swiatek

World number two and five-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek has accepted a one-month suspension after testing positive for a banned substance.

The 23-year-old reigning French Open champion tested positive for a heart medication, trimetazidine (TMZ), in an out-of-competition sample in August 2024, when she was world number one.

The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) accepted that it was caused by contamination of the regulated non-prescription medication melatonin, manufactured and sold in Poland, which Swiatek took for jet lag and sleep issues.

Swiatek's level of fault was therefore considered to be at the lowest end of the range for 'No Significant Fault or Negligence'.

"In the last two-and-a-half months I was subject to strict ITIA proceedings, which confirmed my innocence," she said on Instagram.

"The only positive doping test in my career, showing unbelievably low level of a banned substance I've never heard about before, put everything I've worked so hard for my entire life into question.

"Both me and my team had to deal with tremendous stress and anxiety. Now everything has been carefully explained, and with a clean slate I can go back to what I love most."

Swiatek was provisionally suspended from September 12 before successfully appealing, missing three tournaments.

The Polish player appealed the provisional suspension on September 22, notifying an independent tri-



Swiatek has won the French Open in four of the past five seasons

bunal that the source of the positive test had been identified as a contaminated medicine manufactured in her home country.

After testing confirmed Swiatek's account, the ITIA offered her a one-month suspension which she accepted on Wednesday.

Because her provisional suspension was lifted on October 4, Swiatek's period of ineligibility will end on December 4, 2024.

The Pole was also forced to forfeit the prize money from her run to the Cincinnati Open semifinals, the tournament that directly followed the test.

"I admit this situation hit me hard because all my life I strived to have a career that could be an example for generations to come," added Swiatek.

"I have a sense this situation could undermine the image I've been building for years, which is why I hope you will understand I had no control over it and could do nothing to prevent this unfortunate turn of events.

"Without my supporters I am

not sure I would have been able to find the strength to carry on and keep fighting. Now I have fought the toughest battle in my life, and I hope you will stay with me and keep supporting me."

In addition to her fourth French Open, Swiatek won titles in Doha, Indian Wells, Madrid and Rome in 2024.

She missed the Korea Open (September 16-22), China Open (September 25 - October 6) and Wuhan Open (October 7 - 13 she was suspended during the entry deadline).

The ITIA did not disclose her provisional suspension because the player successfully appealed within 10 days of the notice.

ITIA chief executive Karen Moorhouse said: "Once the source of the TMZ had been established, it became clear that this was a highly unusual instance of a contaminated product, which in Poland is a regulated medicine.

"However, the product does not have the same designation globally, and the fact that a product is a regulated medication in one country cannot of itself be sufficient to avoid any level of fault. Taking into account the nature of the medication, and all the circumstances, it does place that fault at the lowest end of the scale."

Swiatek's suspension comes after men's world number one Jannik Sinner tested positive for clostebol in March.

Although the ITIA accepted there was "no fault or negligence" attached to the 23-year-old Italian, the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) has launched an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas).

## ...Halep Criticises 'Different Approaches' After Decision



Halep won the 2018 French Open and Wimbledon in 2019

Two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep has questioned the "big difference" in how tennis doping cases are handled after world number two Iga Swiatek received a one-month ban.

The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) announced on Thursday that Swiatek had accepted a one-month suspension after testing positive for banned substance trimetazidine (TMZ).

Halep, who was out of action for more than 18 months following two separate anti-doping violations, has criticised the ITIA for having "completely different approaches".

"I stand and ask myself, why is

there such a big difference in treatment and judgment?" Halep posted on Instagram on Friday.

"I can't find and I don't think there can be a logical answer. It can only be bad will from ITIA, the organization that has done absolutely everything to destroy me despite the evidence."

Halep was provisionally suspended in October 2022 after testing positive for banned substance roxadustat - an anti-anaemia drug which stimulates the production of red blood cells in the body.

The Romanian was later banned for four years - a period which was reduced to nine months in March after an appeal at the Court of Arbitration for Sport

Halep always maintained her innocence and argued she had taken a contaminated supplement.

"I lost two years of my career, I lost many nights when I couldn't sleep, thoughts, anxiety, questions without answers," the former world number one said.

"How is it possible that in identical cases happening around the same time, ITIA to have completely different approaches to my detriment?"

Swiatek tested positive for a heart medication, TMZ, in an out-of-competition sample in August 2024, when she was world number one.

The ITIA accepted the five-time

major winner's violation was caused by contamination of the regulated non-prescription medication melatonin, manufactured and sold in Poland, which Swiatek took for jet lag and sleep issues.

An ITIA spokesperson told BBC Sport there were "very important differences" between Halep's case and Swiatek's.

"No two cases are the same, they often involve different circumstances, and direct comparisons are not always helpful," the ITIA said.

"The product contaminated in Ms Swiatek's case was a regulated medication, not a supplement."

Swiatek's suspension comes after men's world number one Jannik Sinner tested positive for clostebol in March.

Although the ITIA accepted there was "no fault or negligence" attached to the 23-year-old Italian, the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) has launched an appeal to Cas.

The ITIA said: "We deal with each case based on the facts and evidence, not a player's name, ranking or nationality. When a prohibited substance is found in a player's system, we investigate it thoroughly.

"We urge players to exercise extreme caution when taking supplements and we are always happy to answer any questions they have."

# Tennis Circuit

## Robson To Be Director Of Women's Event At Queen's

Former British number one Laura Robson has been appointed tournament director of the new women's event at The Queen's Club in London.

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) 500 event, which begins on 9 June 2025, will be the first tour level women's event in London for over 50 years.

Robson has been tournament director at the Nottingham Open for the past two years, having formally retired from playing in 2022.

The 30-year-old, who won Olympic silver in the mixed doubles at London 2012, said she was "delighted to be taking up this role".

She added: "I'm confident that the women's event will be just as thrilling and I can't wait to get started."

Multi-Grand Slam-winning doubles player Jamie Murray will once again oversee the men's tournament, which starts a week later.



Robson reached the fourth round of Wimbledon and the US Open during her career

Following Robson's appointment, Amy Hitchinson has been chosen as her successor at Nottingham, which means that over 70% of LTA grass court major events will have female tournament directors.

## Alcaraz To Play Queen's In 2025



Alcaraz won the Queen's title on his debut at the event in 2023

Two-time Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz will play at Queen's in 2025.

The world number three lifted the title at Queen's Club on his tournament debut in 2023 but lost to

Britain's Jack Draper in the second round last year.

However, the Spaniard triumphed at Wimbledon just a few weeks later on both occasions.

"Lifting the title two years ago is what gave me the belief to go on and win Wimbledon for the first time, so it always means a lot to compete there," the 21-year-old said.

"I love playing in front of the fans in London and I hope I can have another successful summer in the UK."

The men's tournament takes place from June 16 to 22, with Queen's also hosting a women's tournament in 2025 for the first time in more than 50 years.

American Tommy Paul beat Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in the final of last year's event.

## Djokovic 'Looking Forward To Having Murray By His Side'

Andy Murray will coach his long-time former rival Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open in 2025.

Britain's three-time Grand Slam champion Murray, 37, retired from tennis in August after a 19-year career.

Former world number one Murray said he was "looking forward to spending time on the same side of the net as Novak for a change".

The pair will work together in the off-season and in the build-up to the Australian Open, which takes place 12-26 January.

This will be Murray's first coaching role since retiring from playing.

Djokovic, a 24-time Grand Slam champion, has won the Australian Open a record 10 times and beat Murray in four finals in Melbourne.

The 37-year-old Serb posted a video on X of clips of the two, jokingly titled: "He never liked retirement anyway."



Djokovic (right) took part in a ceremony to honour Andy Murray at this year's Wimbledon

# Sport



Embattled Guardiola

## Will Manchester City Tie At Anfield Be A Test Of Guardiola's Mettle?

AYO BADA  
LAGOS

Manchester City, a juggernaut under Pep Guardiola, is facing an unprecedented crisis. The once-dominant force in English football is now teetering on the brink, their aura of invincibility shattered by a series of disappointing results.

Guardiola, renowned for his tactical brilliance, has seen his reputation take a hit. A string of six matches without a draw, culminating in a chaotic 3-3 draw against Feyenoord, has exposed the cracks in City's armor. The recent 4-0 humiliation at the hands of Tottenham Hotspur, ending their 52-game unbeaten home streak, was a particularly painful blow.

The Citizens, now eight points adrift of Liverpool, are struggling to rediscover their rhythm. Erling Haaland, last season's prolific goal scorer, has been noticeably subdued, reflecting a broader issue in City's attacking prowess being the highest goal scorer in the EPL this season. Guardiola has admitted that his team is lacking the usual spark, attributing it to mental and physical fatigue.

The injury to key midfielder Rodri Hernández Cascante has compounded City's woes, and the relentless fixture schedule has further exacerbated the situation. The upcoming match against Liverpool is crucial for Manchester City's title hopes. A loss would significantly hinder their chances, putting them 11 points behind the league leaders and making it nearly

impossible to catch up.

Kyle Walker, a stalwart defender, has urged the team to return to basics, emphasising the importance of solid defensive performances. The match against Liverpool will be a stern test of City's resilience and Guardiola's tactical acumen. Can the Catalan mastermind devise a strategy to halt Liverpool's momentum and reignite City's title challenge?

As the pressure mounts, all eyes will be on Anfield. Will City rise to the occasion or succumb to the weight of expectations?

This clash brings together two EPL giants in a game that could shape the title race.

Liverpool and Manchester City are set to lock horns in one of the most anticipated fixtures of the season. This rivalry has defined the Premier League in recent years,

and this encounter comes with added stakes: City's three-match losing streak in the EPL and Liverpool's quest to extend their lead at the top of the table make this match crucial.

The outcome might determine whether Pep's side can keep their dream of winning the title five times in a row alive. City manager Pep Guardiola acknowledges the challenge his side faces, especially with Anfield's daunting atmosphere.

Liverpool, however, is brimming with confidence. After a resounding 2-0 win against Real Madrid in their last outing, Jürgen Klopp's men seem unstoppable at home.

Manchester City has beaten Liverpool twice across 26 Premier League trips to Anfield.

## Blues Welcome An Out-Of-Form Villa To West London

Chelsea's impressive form under Enzo Maresca faces a tough test as they host Aston Villa. With Cole Palmer and Nicolas Jackson finding form, the Blues look sharper in attack, but Villa's defensive duo of Ezri Konsa, who is expected to make a comeback after being out of play due to injury, and Tyrone Mings might prove impenetrable for Chelsea's attackers.

Chelsea and Aston Villa have played 60 games since 1995. Among them, Chelsea

won 31 games, while Aston Villa won 14 with 15 games ending in a draw.

Chelsea can inflict more misery on out-of-form Aston Villa when the two sides meet in this tie.

The Blues are unbeaten in their last five games across all competitions and go into the game at Stamford Bridge on the back of a 2-0 win over Heidenheim in the Conference League - though it was with a heavily rotated starting lineup - on Thursday evening.

Furthermore, in the Premier League, Chelsea's only defeat since the opening weekend of the season against Manchester City remains the 2-1 loss at Anfield last month.

So whilst Enzo Maresca may not feel his side are genuine title contenders, there is a scenario where the West London outfit end the weekend either second place in the table or six points behind leaders Liverpool.

Still, they will have to be wary of Villa, who have a good recent record at Stam-

ford Bridge, and will be desperate to end a run of seven games without a win across all competitions after being denied a last-gasp win over Juventus in the Champions League on Wednesday night.

Cole Palmer, Wesley Fofana, Romeo Lavia, Malo Gusto, Nicolas Jackson, Moises Caicedo, Pedro Neto, Marc Cucurella and Enzo Fernandez could all return as Maresca reverts back to his Premier League starting XI after making wholesale changes against Heidenheim.

Tottenham return to Premier League action on Sunday in a London derby against Fulham.

Spurs thrashed Manchester City 4-0 last time out in the League but failed to build on that on Thursday when drawing 2-2 with Roma in the Europa League.

Ange Postecoglou's side will no doubt fancy their chances of claiming another victory

## Tottenham Return To PL For Fulham

here but they've proven so inconsistent this season that it's difficult to fully trust them.

Fulham, meanwhile, are smarting after last weekend's 4-1 defeat at home to Wolves but have largely impressed all season.

Spurs look set to be without Cristian Romero again,

with the defender having missed the last four games with toe and hamstring injuries. Micky van de Ven and Guglielmo Vicario are also ruled out, along with Richarlison, Mikey Moore and Wilson Odobert.

Fulham will be without Harrison Reed, while Joa-

chim Andersen and Sander Berge are doubts.

At their best, Spurs can beat any team in the League and proved last week they can fight through the adversity of losing key players. Still, Fulham pose danger of their own and could exploit any defensive weakness.

## Engr. Habu Gumel National Open Weightlifting Championship Begins

AYO BADA  
LAGOS

The Engr. Habu Gumel National Open Weightlifting Championship begins today in Abuja.

According to a release by the Nigeria Weightlifting Federation (NWF) on Friday, the three-day championship named after the President, Nigeria Olympic Committee (NOC), Engr. Habu Gumel will through Tuesday, December 3, 2024.

The open championship which is open to all the 36 states in the federation including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) will hold at the Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Abuja.

Each State is expected to present athletes in all the weightlifting categories in both male and female classics.

Athletes and officials are expected to have arrived on Saturday ahead of today's opening ceremony.

There will be presentation of medals to winners in Snatch, Clean and Jerk and Total on the final day on Tuesday.

Speaking with journalists in Abuja on the Open Championship, the Presi-

dent, NWF Dr. Ibrahim Abdul said the championship which is open to all categories of lifters, is aimed at discovering new talents as well as preparing them for future engagements.

"It's important that we start looking behind to pick and nurture talented lifters who will take over from the current ones. That is the essence of the national open championship. We want to discover new talents and incubate them for national glory. We have athletes right now who are in their prime, doing exceptionally well for the country but we felt that as a federation, there is the need for us to have a reservoir where we can nurture and groom the younger ones.

"The championship is open to all weightlifting associations in the 36 states and the FCT. We want everyone to participate. The recently concluded National Youth Games (NYG) in Asaba was a stage for young athletes who displayed their potentials and the national open championship will give them added exposure as they continue to grow in the sport," he said.

## NSC Synergizes Galaxy Backbone Towards Digitalization Of Stadia Facilities

AYO BADA  
LAGOS

In line with the global digitalization trend, the National Sports Commission (NSC) is set to synergize with Galaxy Backbone for the Digitalization of Stadia facilities and infrastructure across the country.

The Chairman of NSC Mallam Shehu Dikko disclosed this at the weekend when he received members of Galaxy Backbone on a courtesy call in his office at the National Stadium, Abuja.

Mallam Dikko noted that the vision of his administration is to get all the Stadia and sporting infrastructure energized and actively ICT compliant in line with global best practices.

"One of the foundations of hosting an exotic global event is digitalization of all Stadia facilities and infrastructure, and as a country, we should not be left behind. We should be able to get our domestic sports working before going international," Dikko said.

He assured the Galaxy Team of the Commissions intent to partner with the organisation, especially as the National Sports Festival draws near, adding that all the twelve venues of the festival would have to be digitised.

Dikko pointed out that

the vision of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is for the country to have at least six standard and competent stadia to host international events across the six geopolitical zones. This, according to him, "pointed to the urgent need to get our major sporting infrastructure fully activated with proper technology and upgraded to have a proper ICT solution that is stable and consistent."

He explained further that with the ICT in place, E-Games can be introduced in the various sports centres in the country so that people, especially the young ones, can use them for commercial benefits.

Earlier in his remarks, leader of the Galaxy Team Professor Ibrahim Adeyanju said the organisation came in order to identify with the NSC leadership and extend a hand of partnership to the Commission to ensure a digital transformation of sports facilities across the country.

Professor Adeyanju revealed that as a Federal government owned body, the organization has provided services to all Ministries, Departments and Agencies in terms of connectivity which according to him "is very important to all facets of life and that, sports should not be left behind."

IMAM ABDULAZIZ

# How Activation Of Port Harcourt Refinery Silenced NNPC, Tinubu's Scathing Critics

In the wake of the long delay not less than seven missed deadlines, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) on Tuesday, November 26, openly disclosed that it had finally brought to life the 60,000 barrels per day (bpd) phase one of the Port Harcourt Refinery, located in Rivers State.

The corporation also noted that the old Port Harcourt Refinery is currently operating at 70 per cent of its installed capacity, with plans to ramp up to 90 per cent.

Olufemi Soneye, the Chief Corporate Communications Officer of NNPC Ltd, disclosed this in a statement on Tuesday.

The NNPC Ltd made this known in reaction to claims, suggesting that the refinery is not producing products.

"The board and management of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd) express heartfelt appreciation to Nigerians for their support and excitement over the safe and successful restart of the 60,000 barrels-per-day Old Port Harcourt Refinery.

"This achievement marks a significant step forward after years of operational challenges and underperformance. We are, however, aware of unfounded claims by certain individuals suggesting that the refinery is not producing products.

"For clarity, the Old Port Harcourt Refinery is currently operating at 70 percent of its installed capacity, with plans to ramp up to 90 percent," Mr Soneye said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the NNPC Ltd said the Port Harcourt refinery had commenced production after a long period of rehabilitation.

The NNPC Ltd said the refinery began truck loading of petroleum products on Tuesday, 26 November.

In its statement Tuesday night, the NNPC said the refinery is producing daily outputs of straight-run gasoline (Naphtha): blended into 1.4 million liters of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS or pet-



Mele Kyari

rol), Kerosene: 900,000 litres, Automotive Gas Oil (AGO or Diesel): 1.5 million litres, Low Pour Fuel Oil (LPFO): 2.1 million litres and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG): additional volumes.

Mr Soneye noted that the refinery incorporates crack C5, a blending component from its sister company, Indorama Petrochemicals (formerly Eleme Petrochemicals), to produce gasoline that meets the required specifications.

According to him, blending is a standard practice in refineries globally, noting that no single unit can produce gasoline that fully complies with any country's standards without such processes.

"Additionally, we have made substantial progress on the new Port Harcourt

Refinery, which will begin operations soon without prior announcements.

"We urge Nigerians to focus on the remarkable achievements being realised under the able and progressive leadership of President Bola Tinubu and to support efforts aimed at delivering more dividends to the nation.

"Malicious attacks on clear progress only undermine the significant strides made by NNPC Ltd and the country. Let us move forward together in building a stronger and more self-sufficient energy sector," he added.

Soneye while reacting to how the challenges were surmounted noted: "We partnered with and drew on the wealth of experience from an external party who had carried out commissioning

and startup, currently operating and maintaining several refineries. The injection of these additional, highly skilled and competent resources was the game changer.

"We also identified and mobilised retired NNPC staff who had worked in the refineries, their experience and expertise were useful. We carried out a detailed technical review to understand and identify areas of vulnerabilities; we put a system in place to eliminate and address the bad actors systematically."

The Group CEO, Engineer Mele Kyari, however, thanked President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for his unwavering support and understanding towards the rehabilitation project and for his persistence to ensure energy security for the country.

Kyari also expressed appreciation to the NNPC's Board of Directors and the staff for their support and commitment, which climaxed in the streaming of the refinery.

He commended the contractors for doing a great job in ensuring that the refinery was delivered despite all challenges.

The NNPC boss also thanked Nigerians for their patience and for the legitimate expectations on the company to deliver on the other refineries.

He said: "We are going to see loading today. I just want to add that without leadership support, you cannot achieve results like this. And we are convinced beyond all doubt that without the support, perseverance, and patience of Mr. President, we would not have achieved this fate.

"And all of us must congratulate him because it is his massive pressure that made us to come to this level. And we are very happy. And I congratulate my

colleagues in the refinery and outside the refinery, our contractors, and even our regulators for helping us and supporting us coming to this level.

"It is possible. This country, this refinery has shown that with persistence, with the right focus, with the right leadership support, which we have today, that we know that anything is possible. And this country is going great under the leadership of President Tinubu."

In retrospect, when Kyari assumed office, NNPC (as then was) was plagued by inefficiencies, corruption, and stagnation. However, under his leadership, the corporation has undergone a remarkable transformation. Kyari's commitment to transparency, accountability, and innovation has been instrumental in driving NNPC's success.

One of Kyari's key achievements is the implementation of the Transparency, Accountability, and Performance Excellence (TAPE) agenda. This initiative has ensured that NNPC's operations are open, transparent, and accountable, thereby restoring public trust and confidence.

Furthermore, Kyari has championed the diversification of NNPC's revenue streams, investing in gas, power, and renewable energy. This strategic move has not only reduced the corporation's dependence on crude oil sales but also positioned NNPC for long-term sustainability.

The FY2023 results, for example, are a testament to Kyari's visionary leadership. The record-breaking net profits and revenues demonstrate NNPC's potential for growth and profitability. Kyari's ability to navigate the complex energy landscape, drive innovation, and foster collaboration has been pivotal in achieving this success.

## NEWS

APATA OYENIRAN  
LAGOS

## States May Miss SDG Goal 4 Target Over Poor Funding Of Basic Education – Report

Available data and records indicate that poor commitment to funding of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) by some states of the federation may cause Nigeria to miss the SDG Goal 4 2030 target.

This also came to light when Dr. Hamid Bobboyi, the Executive Secretary of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), presented the 2020 and 2023 budget implementation report to the Senate Committee on Basic and Secondary Education in Abuja.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) sets out to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong

learning opportunities for all.

The seven outcome targets are free primary and secondary education; equal access to quality pre-primary education; affordable technical, vocational and higher education; increased number of people with relevant skills for financial success; elimination of all discrimination in education; universal literacy and numeracy; and education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

The UBEC boss disclosed that N135,540,905,308.92 in matching grants have not been accessed by states in the last few years.

Revelations during recent-ly concluded Basic Education

on Nigeria Bootcamp (BEN-B) pointed to low commitment to some of the goals set by the Federal Ministry of Education and Universal Basic Education Commission and other development partners.

A data mapping analysis obtained by Sunday Independent showed uninteresting performances by states.

### POOR BUDGETARY ALLOCATION, SAFETY COMMITMENT

In the area of finance, though the Commission acknowledged an increase in budget allocations to Basic Education by some state governments, the Commission emphasised the need for allo-

cation of more resources in appropriate quantum to increase in access and expected quality outcomes.

The data also showed poor commitments to school safety measures prescribed to ensure the safety of pupils, girls and environment. A whopping 60 per cent of the schools in reviewed states are not safe, while 17 per cent do not completely prioritise safety.

### TEACHING SHORTCOMINGS

In comparison, the world average is 25.28 students per teacher; the UBEC data mapping indicated 40:1 in many states under the period of reviews.

## Anambra Warns Monarch, Others Over Suspected Sponsorship Of Market Leadership Crisis

OKEOGBUEHI  
UCHECHUKWUJEME,  
ONITSHA

Barring any last minute development, Anambra State government is likely to crack down on the traditional ruler of Mkpunando in Aguleri, Anambra East Local Government Council Area of Anambra State, Igwe Johnson Mbanefo, following suspicion of his support for moves to conduct market leadership election in Aguleri Junction Timber/ Building Materials Market Association in the area.

There have been moves by a group backed by the monarch to

put in place a new leadership for Aguleri Junction Timber/ Building Materials Market Association for weeks now.

It is believed that an interested party is being egged on by Igwe Mbanefo to impose a stooge on the seat.

The government, according to investigation, has not lifted the embargo it imposed on conduct of election in the markets in the state through Evaristus Uba, Special Adviser to the Governor on Trade and Markets.

The planned election is, therefore, seen by the state government as an affront, hence the caution to the monarch to retrace his footsteps or have himself to blame.

VICTORIA OJUGBANA  
LAGOS

## Africa's Largest Food Hub, Psychiatric Hospital To Be Ready Next Year, Says Sanwo-Olu

Lagos State governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, has revealed that the Lagos Central Food Security Systems, Logistics Park, and the 500-Bed Psychiatric Hospital, which is to be the largest in Africa, built in the Epe area of the state, will be completed by next year.

Sanwo-Olu, who disclosed

this while on a working visit to the projects on Saturday, said that the Lagos Central Food Security Systems, Logistics Park will be ready in the second quarter of 2024 while the Psychiatric Hospital will be ready by the fourth quarter next year.

The governor explained that

the food hub "Was envisioned five years ago where we said the minimum we can do even if we are not an agro-producing state is to have our destiny in our hands. "Covid that happened in 2020 taught us a lesson because it was during that time we saw a global disruption chain of logistics of food. You re-

member at that time, if you don't have anything in your house, you continue to pray to God.

"Even after we saw global disruption and that is when we came up with a plan that Lagos should be a very large scale food logistics hub to protect itself from food insecurity.

"We did mention at that time that food is security and it is becoming as important and even a normal threat to life's security. We can see that indeed that move that we made three years ago is on the right course.

"The largest food logistics hub in the whole sub-Saharan Africa is here. It is on over 230 hectares of land, about five thousand square metres. It is going to be the largest biggest cold and dry

chain storage."

Dwelling on the 500-bed facility Psychiatric Hospital, the state Commissioner for Health, Prof. Akin Abayomi, said that the facility will help to promote mental healthcare delivery in the country.

He made this known at the Vanguard Mental Health Summit in Lagos, with the theme: "Mobilising for Systemic Change and Better Mental Healthcare in Nigeria."



**Can Man City End Winless Streak At Table Topping Liverpool?** P.27

# Dele Sobowale On The Other Hand

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## Requiem For PDP

"All political parties die at last of swallowing their own lies." - Dr Arbuthnot, 1667-1735, VANGUARD BOOK OF QUOTATIONS, VBQ p 191.

**N**ote: This article started on the day of the Ondo State Election. The result was not surprising. "You can't beat something with nothing". PDP is now nothing.

Obong Victor Attah, former Governor of Akwa Ibom State and former Trustee of the PDP, is an internationally-recognised Architect. He was the first African to be granted licence to practice as an Architect in New York State. Attah turned 86 on November 20 this year. Few Nigerians are aware that Attah designed the PDP flag. As a member of the G-34, a group led by late Dr Aler Ekwueme, GCON, former Vice President, 1979-1983, and an artist like all architects, the flag symbolised an all-inclusive party. Its original constitution reflected the intention of the founding fathers to create a society in which glaring marginalisation of any group will not be allowed. Ekwueme was on the way to become the first President elected under the PDP banner when powerful people intruded into the party; forced PDP to violate its own constitution and accept Obasanjo as their candidate. The facts are detailed in PDP: CORRUPTION INCORPORATED. Self-righteous Obasanjo was thus the first beneficiary of the corruption of a sacred set of political principles laid out by patriotic Nigerians.

Obasanjo quickly moved to dismantle the PDP constitution and to substitute one which was an image of himself - a dictator at heart; despite his hypocritical pronouncements now. He appointed and removed party Chairmen at will and approved candidates for elections at all three tiers of government. How he removed Chief Audu Ogbah would bring tears to anyone's eyes. He sowed the seeds of the destruction of our democracy.

Today, Attah is no longer active in politics. But, at 86, he must certainly feel disillusioned by what the PDP has become. The flag he designed is now a mockery of what the PDP has become in his life time. I was still writing this article when the result of the Ondo State election was announced. It is predictable what will follow. There will be a massive desertion of the PDP to the APC. A few years ago, when late Vincent Ogbulafor, then Chairman of the party, announced as if he was God, that "PDP will rule for seventy years", I told him that he will not live for 70 years, but he might live long enough to see the party out of power. He did both. PDP had been living on borrowed time since Jonathan lost control of the party and suffered defeat. Now time has run out



Amb. Umar Damagum

for the party.

Even now, close to half of the leading members of the APC were once in PDP.

More will now follow; leaving a party, so weak as not to offer much opposition to the APC. Mr. Daniel Bawl, former spokesman for Atiku, the presidential candidate of the PDP in the 2023 elections, who was blasting the APC as lustfully as he did since the elections in September this year, was invited by President Tinubu to "come and eat". He quickly accepted the offer and is now eating in Aso Rock and singing the praises of his new paymaster. That raises the question: which party will defeat APC in 2027? The answer curiously enough might be APC itself or a new party primarily Northern based. In fact, we might be heading for regional parties such as we had before 1960.

Two developments account for this position.

One, the APC, never a political party, in just nine and a half years, has left the North reassessing its support for APC. The eight years of Buhari blinded the people to assume that the party was working in their own interests. His departure had laid bare the truth. Under Buhari, APC was a party of the elite, by the elite and for the elite. Tinubu's presidency has marginalised the Northern elite; like never before. They want to re-

dress the situation as soon as possible.

Two, hitherto, Northerners have lacked a rallying point; there was no common agenda. Tinubu's Tas Reform Bill, considered anti-North by the vast majority, has provided the impetus for regional collective action. It is doubtful if any Northern politician will support the bill and survive politically. As one

**Even now, close to half of the leading members of the APC were once in PDP.**

old friend from the North West told me, "I canvassed for votes for Tinubu. He is holding a knife to our throats in the North. We will not allow him to get away with it." It was therefore not surprising to me that all the Northern governors are opposed to the Tas Bill. The real surprise was the unanimous opposition of Southern governors as well. Given the fact that the majority of Governors belong to the APC, that has revealed the lack of principle within the party. It is doubtful if any Republican Governor will oppose a Tax Bill

proposed by Trump because the party's position on taration has been consistent for over a hundred years. A situation in which the President's own party Governors and most National Assembly members might turn against him is worrisome - even if expected in a nation where politics without principles is the norm.

### Tax Reform: Possible Isolation Of Lagos State

"There are plans from Lagos to colonise the North." Kwakwanso.

The Presidential candidate of the NNDP is not alone in condemning the Tar Reform Bills; which most commentators, nationally, have not read; and very few understand. But, it now serves as a fulcrum for moving massive Northern sentiments against the APC in the region. The Arewa Consultative Forum, ACE, a few days after Kwakwanso spoke, made an even more unmistakable declaration.

2027: "North'll be best served by Northerners". - Report November 21, 2024.

Just in case anybody in Abuja misses the point, the ACE Chairman said that "Notwithstanding the parlous state of Arewa's glaring economic conditions, the policies of the current Federal Government has continued to make matters much worse, with little indications of needed sensitivity to the precarious existential conditions of Arewa people... economic reforms while indeed desirable, should not impoverish the same people they are meant to serve...". Battle line drawn.

Elected, as well as appointed, APC Northern politicians are now confronted with an unpleasant dilemma: continue supporting Tinubu and his policies or bail out. Either way, there will be serious consequences. I don't envy Vice President Shetima or Ganduie. The attempt by the Board of Trustees, BOT, of the ACE, to distance the old association from Dr Mamman Osuman's outburst by suspending the Chairman, was a blunder. The blowback by several Northern groups, especially Youth Groups, points to the possibility that the more cautious and conservative elders might not be aware of the depth of hostility to FG's reforms. Nigeria is getting ripe for demagogues.

Historically, demagoguery triumphs when there is a very angry, dissatisfied section of the populace who want simple answers to very complicated problems; and when the section can identify another distinct group to blame for its problems. Kwakwanso, focussing on the section of the Tax Bill which recommends the principle of derivation to be adopted for Value Added Tax, VAT, revenue allocation represents the Northern view that with Lagos accounting for

over 50 per cent of the VAT revenue collected, any change in that direction will adversely affect their states. Kwakwanso has deliberately ignored the fact that not only Northern states will be affected. Even all the rest of the South West states will lose. But, President Tinubu is from Lagos State; so the conspiracy to further impoverish the North must be a Lagos agenda. That is most unfortunate, because it has shifted the discussion from addressing the merits of the Tas proposal to North versus Lagos. More unfortunate is the fact that the Northern leaders conveniently forget that the Nigerian economy was already ruined by the time Buhari finished his eight years in office. More importantly, as the Emir of Kano, Lamido, has warned repeatedly, the North was ruining itself - not Lagos.

Virtually all those in APC, NNDP, LP in the North were in PDP before; when the seeds of destruction of the economy were sown.

Not to be left behind, the Northern Elders Forum, NEF, led by Professor Ango Abdullahi, sent a chilling message. Read some of it; and it is clear why political lines have disappeared in the North.

"The Tas Reform Bill is conceived in bad faith, poorly packaged and is a palpable threat to our unity and national cohesion.

The brazen way and suspicious manner in which the Tax Bill was imposed on the nation confirmed the sinister intentions of those promoting this outrageous Bill.

The days are fast gone when such conspiratorial connivance against the vital and strategic interest of the region, either by those within or outside of the region, would be condoned or even tolerated".

Non-partisan political war could not have been more brutally declared. The attackers have the advantage. Serious economic hardship, especially coming so suddenly and brutally, invariably gives rise to the search for scapegoats - people on whom to place the blame. Despite Benjamin Franklin's, 1706-1790, that, "In this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes", few people except government officials want to hear the word TAX. But, where there are political parties in the real sense of the world, the Tas Bill should have been discussed with party leaders of the ruling party; and everybody should now be out fighting for its passage. The party no longer counts in this struggle.

LAST LINE. Tinubu and his inner circle of advisers missed a vital step in advancing this Tax Bill. Now, the Bill is virtually dead on arrival.

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