

OBINNA EMELIKE & INIOBONG IWOK

Before the February 25, 2023 presidential election, there was a somewhat 'hope rising' feeling in the air, as many Nigerians planned to use their votes to reclaim the country

from the selfish and non-performing politicians, who have held the country hostage and its development dwarfed since the return to democratic rule in 1999.

Today, that feeling seems to be replaced with anger and

Continues on page 3

Sunday 12 MARCH 2023

www.businessday.ng www.facebook.com/businessdayng businessDayNG @businessdayng Vol 1, No. 441

₦400

Industries account for annual IGR of N20bn in Nasarawa



Page 14

Train accident: Sanwo-Olu pays condolence visit to deceased families



Page 15

IWD: Early empowerment panacea to women's economic emancipation -Olori Atuwatse III



Page 29

Taiye Idahor: Female artist on the rise



Page 30

How increased women's empowerment can foster growth



38

Shift to renewable sources is inevitable in the real estate sector - Tunde Cash



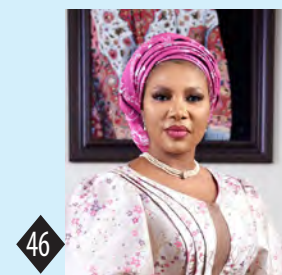
43

'How Middle East Energy can quicken Nigeria's green transition plan'



44

Good governance: Maryam Shetty leading by empowering others



46

Cash crunch:

Is Nigeria shutting down?

- Citizens at crossroads As Buhari, Emefiele keep mum over S/Court ruling
Families, workers bear brunt of executive arrogance See story on page 2



President Muhammadu Buhari



Olukayode Ariwola, chief justice of Nigeria



Godwin Emefiele, CBN, governor



Corps members express safety concerns ahead of guber poll

You are on your own, NYSC tells conniving corps members

GODSGIFT ONYEDINEFU

Ahead of the 2023 Gubernatorial and State House of Assembly elections shifted to March 18, some serving members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) have expressed concerns over their safety, especially following reported attacks and intimidation of corps members during the presidential election.

A corps member, who served as an adhoc staff for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Bwari Local government area of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and spoke on condition of anonymity, said the reported attacks heightened his fears and among his colleagues some of which are hesitant about continuing the exercise. "I saw so much reports on how corps members were attacked, beaten and threatened. I heard

Capital Territory (FCT) and spoke on condition of anonymity, said the reported attacks heightened his fears and among his colleagues some of which are hesitant about continuing the exercise. "I saw so much reports on how corps members were attacked, beaten and threatened. I heard

Continues on page 8

INEC: Wrong time to mess up with numbers

As Commission fails experts' integrity test

NOSA IGBINADOR

Mobilised by protests against police brutality in 2020, Nigeria's young were determined to ensure a credible election process in 2023 to birth the country they desire.

Youths constitute the highest number of registered voters in the country. More than a third of Nigeria's 93.4 million registered voters are young people between the ages of 18 and 34.

"It (#EndSARS protests) underscored for young people

Continues on page 17

Cover

Is Nigeria shutting down?

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

The question on the lips of many Nigerians at this time is if the country is shutting down. This became pertinent following the dead silence from President Muhammadu Buhari who commissioned the Naira redesigning policy carried out by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

Since last week, when the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court, gave its ruling that the old and new naira notes should continue to circulate as legal tender till December of this year, neither Buhari nor Godwin Emefiele, CBN governor, has said any word on the next move.

Their silence has continued to negatively impact the lives of Nigerians and the nation's economy.

The lingering scarcity of naira bills has continued to affect every aspect of Nigeria's economy. Workers who board public transport to office are no longer coping as there is no notes to pay the fare. Transporters are not accepting transfers owing to network failures that have seen many businesses lose some money transferred to their accounts but could not deliver afterward.

The frustrating part of the policy to many Nigerians is that the "corrupt politicians" said to be the target of President Buhari outsmarted him and got all the money they needed to prosecute their campaign and election, as attested to by Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, presidential candidate of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), when he was interviewed by Channels Television before the election.

Buhari had on several occasions said that the naira redesign became necessary to check corrupt politicians from using their ill-gotten money to buy votes.

He got the CBN to starve the masses of money. Now, when the presidential election has been over and Nigerians expected the release of the new naira bills or at worst allow the old bills circulate as has been ordered by the Supreme Court, the Executive arm of government would have none of that. Executive arrogance and impunity has been the order of the day, to the chagrin of many citizens.

Following the Supreme Court ruling, cash-strapped citizens had rushed to their banks for money. Some were given the old notes, but because nothing has been heard from Buhari, nobody is accepting the money from them transactionally. Some of those who collected such old notes said when they went back to return the money to the bank, they were told that banks no longer accept old notes; that they should follow CBN's guideline of returning old notes and do accordingly.

There is confusion everywhere mingled with extreme suffering.

Unlike the initial time when the Point of Purchase (PoS) operators had some money to sell to Nigerians, this time around, they



have shut down. A few of them still operating are those who have a deal with some foodstuff sellers who give them some money after each day's sales.

In such few places, Nigerians who want to collect N10,000 pay N4,000 as commission; which means that in real sense, they are given N6,000. Even at that, the PoS are so few to serve the crowd that need whatever they could get to feed their families.

Commercial banks appear to be in the dark of what is actually happening.

Unconfirmed reports said that President Buhari decided to keep quiet to "teach the governors who dragged him to court a lesson." The report insinuated that he is trying to "show them that the buck stops at his table", and that "after all, he is leaving office in the next two months."

Many Nigerians see Buhari's posturing over the naira issue as uncalled for. They wonder why an out-going president, whose tenure since 2015 has been traumatic would not want to leave a good name for himself, "even at this dying minutes of his administration."

It was gathered weekend that following the pain Nigerians are experiencing and the refusal of the Federal Government to heed the Supreme Court's order, some state governors are in the process of initiating contempt proceedings against Abubakar Malami, attorney-general of the Federation and minister of Justice, and Emefiele.

It was also gathered that the Federal Government has been served with the enrolled order and Certified True Copy of last week's Supreme Court judgment ordering that the old N1,000, N500, and N200 notes should be in circulation alongside the new notes till December 31, 2023.

The lamentation of Nigerians:

"This naira scarcity is beginning to take a toll on Nigerians irrespective of their class. On Friday, March 10, 2023, I wanted to go to Victoria Island area of Lagos for a business meeting, but I was so low on cash that I had only N400 on me for a journey that would ordinarily cost at least N2,500 to foot the transportation fare to and fro," said Joseph Adewale, a Lagos resident, who works with one of the blue-chip companies in Lagos.

Adewale said he practically visited the whole PoS operators within his area in Ikotun, a Lagos suburban, in search of cash without any luck that morning until he was left with one option, which was to approach an attendant in a petrol station.

"After several minutes of persuasion, the petrol attendant agreed to give me N2,000 cash on the basis that I must transfer N2,200 to the petrol station's account even without buying any fuel from them. That petrol attendant was my saviour that day," he said.

According to him, the painful aspect of the cash crunch situation in Nigeria is that one would have money in the bank and yet finds it difficult to access the money when one needs it.

He said that many Nigerians now spend money to buy their own money from PoS operators who also use the money to buy money from market women, transporters, bankers and other petty traders. He said people now use as much as N1,500 or N2,000 to buy N5,000 while others pay between N3,000 and N4,000 to buy N10,000.

Adewale said that he knows of a banker friend who runs a PoS business as a side hustle, but the shop has been locked for up to

two months now due to a lack of cash to continue the business.

He said that the friend had not only stopped the young man that runs the business for him from coming to work but has also been worried about how to raise the money to pay the shop rent, which will expire by May this year.

Justina Osaro, Lagos businesswoman, told our correspondent how she spent close to 2 hours at the bus station due to a lack of enough cash to go to Yaba that day to buy goods.

According to her, she had to borrow N1,000 from a neighbour to pay her transportation fare to her destination, adding that she had to spend longer time at bus stops to wait for cheaper commercial buses.

"Today, one will go shopping, sell goods that are worth over N100,000 and still beg for money to transport oneself back home. The other day, I had to trek from Egbeda where my shop is located to my sister's house in the Idimu area due to a lack of cash to pay my transport fare. On that fateful day, I sold goods worth over N70,000 and all customers paid using a transfer. It was my elder sister that gave me money to complete my journey that day," Osaro explained.

She said that she no longer goes to her shop every day like she used to do before as she stays home any day she feels like there would not be many customers to patronise her business.

The cash crunch situation has created a lot of confusion in society as many Nigerians now do the transaction with old N500 and N1000 notes, which are no longer legal tenders in Nigeria.

Presently, there are traders who specialise in accepting old naira notes from buyers on the condi-

tion of paying more for goods.

Citing an example Chioma Obasi, a Lagos housewife, said she had to buy bread that ordinarily goes for N750 for N1,000 because she had old naira notes on her.

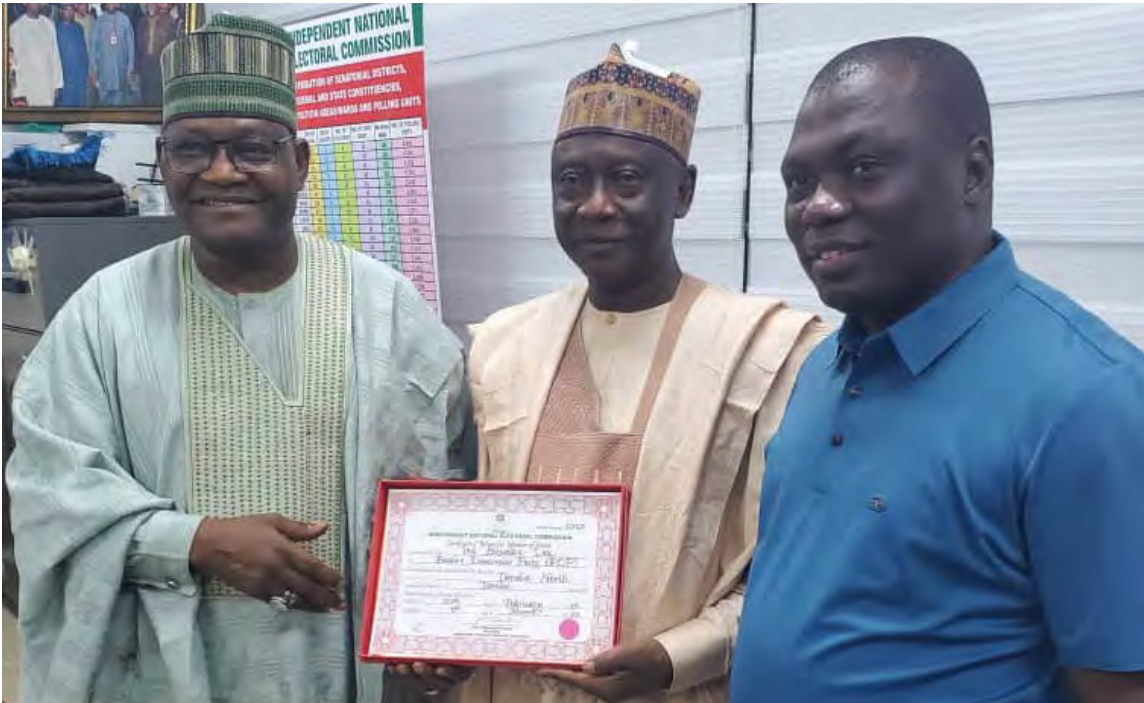
She said traders who accept the old naira notes increase the prices of goods and people patronise them because they were looking for a way to dispose of the old notes.

"The worst aspect of the naira issue is that banks recently started paying customers with old N500 and N1,000 naira notes and when one collects it, he or she would not see any trader that is willing to collect from it because the Central Bank and Federal Government have not made any comment on it. Even the bank that is paying customers with the old note will tell you that they will not accept it if you return it," she said.

Obasi said that the development has also worsened the inflation in the country as the prices of food have skyrocketed beyond the reach of many families.

According to her, her aged mother, who lives in a village in the eastern part of the country was forced to eat only yam for a period of one week due to lack of cash to buy foodstuff from the market to cook either soup or stew.

"My mother had money in the bank but could not access the money to buy foodstuff. She used to enter the banking hall to withdraw money but the long queue in the bank has been making it very difficult for her. She said that people now wake up as early as 4am or 5am to go to queue up in the bank and not in all cases that the bank pays customers because in some cases it ends up being a fruitless endeavour," Obasi said.



Taraba guber poll: PDP candidate confident of victory

...Says no retreat, forward ever

JAMES KWEN

Agbu Kefas, the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the next Saturday's governorship election in Taraba State, has expressed the optimism that the party would retain power given its dominance at in the recent Presidential and National Assembly polls.

According to him, the PDP has done a lot and will continue to strive to take Taraba State to the promised land.

Kefas stated these at the INEC headquarters in Abuja at the weekend when he accompanied

two PDP senators-elect from his state to collect their certificates of return.

The senators-elect are the current deputy governor of Taraba State, Haruna Manu (Taraba Central) and Shuaibu Lau (Taraba North).

He said, "Our great party, the PDP, will continue to shine. There's no vacancy for the opposition in Taraba because we have done well and we promise to do more as we take the State to the promised land.

"Our determination to retain power come Saturday March 11 2023 is a battle of no retreat, no surrender. Our theme is moving

forward and as you can see we are already surging ahead in the poll."

Earlier in their remarks, the senators-elect said they came with the governorship candidate in their entourage to affirm their commitment to the party's victory.

Manu said with the dominance of the PDP at the national legislature, Kefas administration will enjoy tremendous support needed to move the state forward.

Lau said he would work assiduously to deliver Kefas in the state because PDP is the only party that can guarantee development.

Elections: Can the judiciary...

Continued from page 1

frustration as many believe that the result as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) did not reflect what they voted for.

As expected, the parties and their presidential candidates that believe their mandates were stolen have since gone to court to challenge the results.

All eyes are now on the judiciary.

The Nigerian judiciary is struggling to gain people's confidence due to so many opportunities it has had in the recent past to save democracy or set sound precedence, but disappointed with its publicly criticised rulings.

That fear that the judiciary cannot be trusted is also a reason to ask if the judiciary can save the country as both presidential candidates of the Labour Party and Peoples Democratic Party are currently in court to challenge the declaration of the All Progressives Congress presidential candidate as the winner of the February 25th poll.

Chijioke Umelahi, former Abia lawmaker and legal practitioner, thinks that the judiciary has never been independent as appointment of the judges is heavily influenced by the President.

Considering that lack of independence, Umelahi argued that the judiciary cannot be trusted to save the country in the legal battles following any unpopular declaration by the INEC.

"I don't see the judiciary that lacked power to challenge the executive or to checkmate the excesses of the legislature doing something to rewrite its name in gold. The calibre of judges there seems compromised," Umelahi said.

Considering the above argument, many decry that it is still the same judiciary that made the very unpopular and undemocratic judgment in the last Imo State gubernatorial election, with the negative fallout still trailing the state.

Till date, many mock Hope Uzodinma, the governor of Imo State, as the 'Supreme Court Governor'. Imo people see his government as illegitimate, which reportedly accounted for the high level of insecurity in the state.

Recently, the Supreme Court's declaration of Ahmad Lawan as APC's Yobe North senatorial candidate and Godswill Akpabio as the validly nominated APC candidate for Akwa-Ibom North-West senatorial seat based on technicalities, did not go down well with the generality of Nigerians.

Both participated as aspirants at the APC presidential primaries, and by law, forfeiting other political offices. But the Supreme Court ruled in their favour after losing at the presidential primaries of their party.

These are some of the worrisome cases that make many Nigerians to further lose confidence in the judiciary, and also do not see it salvaging the country's democracy.

"If the Supreme Court can rule that a candidate who came third in an election can become the governor and today he is, it means it can do more at the presidential level because of the benefit that can come to the judges afterwards," Peter Oseni, a serving senior public servant, said.

According to him, the judiciary is heavily compromised and the system of appointing the judges is no longer on merit as Mr. President can pick undeserving judges and make them his puppet at the upper echelon court.

"If you have followed the kind of judges we have had at the Supreme Court especially since Buhari came to power, you will notice that most of them are not the most senior, most qualified and are considered based on Mr. President's criteria. So, they will be answerable to the President and not to Nigerians. Those Mr. President appoint-

ed judges are still at the Appeal and Supreme courts, Abubakar Malami is still there too, so how do you expect good judgment for the people," Oseni argued.

Toeing a different line, Samuel Onikoyi, a Nigerian academia in Belgium, noted that the Supreme Court may likely save its name and regain people's confidence with a surprise ruling in the presidential election debacle.

"We know the court has failed, but not all of them are compromised. Remember that the ruling on Ahmad Lawan's senatorial candidacy for Yobe North was a three-against-two split judgment of the Supreme Court's five-member panel.

"So, there are still some upright judges out there at the Supreme Court, Justice Mary Odili proved herself while there, there are others and aggrieved masses can get judgment at the Supreme Court this time," Onikoyi said.

Saying that the current cases before the judiciary may be a make or mar for the arm of government, Onikoyi said: Well, Nigerians await the Supreme Court to prove them wrong, regain its lost confidence or allow illegitimacy to thrive."

Onyeka Ikwunze, a Political Science lecturer at Abia State University, Uturu, said that there was hope this time at the Supreme Court because the new Electoral Act has been contravened, and that there is much evidence that cannot be thwarted and the lawyers know all these.

"I see the Supreme Court standing with the people because of the clear evidence and the fact that INEC violated the provisions of the new Electoral Act. Again, the fact that the results were written manually rather than using the new machines, which Nigeria spent billions of Naira to acquire, are enough to cancel the result. The fear now will be money to hold another election if the Supreme Court rules for rerun of the election," Ikwunze said.

Some optimistic minds also think that while Abubakar Malami, Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice of Nigeria, is known to support the government of the day, Olukayode Ariwoola, the new Chief Justice of Nigeria, who emerged on merit, may likely set things right.

"I think a lot of people are not happy with the judgments coming out of our courts in recent time, look at the Imo State case where a sitting governor was removed by questionable judgment. The judiciary is at its lowest ebb now.

"But we are hoping they can redeem themselves with this presidential election matter and let the will of Nigerians prevail," Tope Musowo, a public affairs analyst, said.

Musowo noted that a reform of the judiciary in Nigeria was overdue.

"There are so many things wrong with our judiciary there is no doubt the system needs reform, even from the appointment of judges to infrastructures at the courts," he added.

Eddy Olafeso, a politician, said that the judiciary has opportunity to redeem itself in view of recent criticism, stressing that the international community and everyone would be watching with keen interest.

"I think the judiciary is aware of the public confidence in them is now very low, you can see the criticism that trailed the Lawan judgement, but I think they can redeem themselves with the presidential election case.

"It is an opportunity for them, all eyes are on them, let's wait and see what would happen this time around. The parties would be presenting their case and I can tell you that unlike in the past, justice can't be stolen this time around," he said.

Obi's lawyers to take action against INEC over refusal to inspect BVAS

INIOMBONG IWOK

The legal team of the presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi have vowed to take action against the the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman, Mahmoud Yakubu following the deliberate refusal of the Commission to allow the legal team of the LP candidate inspect election materials in line with the order of the Court of Appeal.

The court in the ruling last Wednesday refused to grant a request by INEC seeking to vary the order of the court granting access to Obi as well as the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) counterpart, Atiku Abubakar to inspect the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and other election materials.

The panel in the ruling said the application was unnecessary because the court never granted permission to Atiku, Obi, and their parties to scientifically access and inspect INEC's database.

The tribunal said the apprehension

being expressed by INEC, which includes the possible revelation of the identities of voters and their voting choices, was unnecessary because no applicant was granted leave to access INEC's data base.

Ruling on INEC's motion, the 3-man panel held that the electoral umpire's application is without merit and is refused, noting that all the orders allowing Obi to inspect election materials stand.

INEC, in apparent reaction to the ruling, stated that the commission was not against litigants inspecting election materials, while reaffirming that it will continue to grant all litigants access to the materials they require to pursue their cases in court.

But speaking to newsmen on Saturday, a member of Obi's legal team, Alex Ejesieme SAN, said that the electoral umpire has not granted them access to election materials.

He accused INEC of deliberately trying to delay Obi's legal team from instituting a petition against the presidential election as prescribed by the Electoral Act, adding that

the electoral umpire knows that accessing the election materials will expose alleged ballot rigging in the election.

According to the lawyer, "Well, we have written to them (INEC), we have done everything possible and they have refused to allow us to inspect. So, we are going to review our positions this weekend and by Monday, we will know the next thing to do," the lawyer said.

"Yes. You know, what they are doing is deliberate. Ordinarily, the proper thing for us to do is to commence committal proceedings against the INEC chairman and the officers involved but remember, by the Electoral Act 2022, we are supposed to file a petition."

The SAN said the legal team was ready to take necessary measures for the commission to comply with the order of the court.

"We will take steps to mount pressure on them to allow us to have copies of the electoral materials in line with the order of the court of Appeal," Ejesieme added.

News



L-R: House of Representatives' members elect: Adegbesan Joseph (Ijebu-North/East/Ogun Waterside); Gboyega Nasir Isiaka (Yewa North/Imeko-Afon); Olumide Osoba (Obafemi/Owode/Odeda/Abeokuta North); Isiaka Ibrahim (Ifo/Ewekoro); Governor Dapo Abiodun; Adewunmi Onanuga (Remo); Isiaq Akinlade (Yewa South/Ipokia); Tunji Akinosi (Ado-Odo/Ota); Afolabi Afuwape (Abeokuta South) and Femi Ogunbanwo (Ijebu Central) displaying their certificates of return during an All Progressives Congress victory parley at the Governor's country home, Iperu-Remo, Ikenne Local Government Area of Ogun State on Friday.

Ogun guber: PLWD, NLC declare support for Abiodun's re-election bid

RAZAQ AYINLA

AHEAD of the next Saturday's governorship election, the Association of People Living with Disability (PLWD) in Ogun State, has endorsed Governor Dapo Abiodun for a second term.

Speaking on behalf of the association, the state chairman, Michael Ebor, who commended the governor for looking out for his members during the COVID-19 pandemic, acknowledged him for the rehabilitation work currently going on at their secretariat.

He further commended the governor for adopting an inclusive government, expressing the association's belief in the leadership qualities of Governor Abiodun.

Ebom, while calling on the state government to capture the people living with disability in the Ogun State Health Insurance Scheme, asked for the empowerment of some of their members with special vocational skills.

He said that the people living with disability need empathy and not sympathy, pointing out that they would give the governor 100 percent support during the governorship and House of Assembly elections.

In his response, Governor Abiodun, commended members of the association for brushing up their skills so as to be relevant in the society and promised that he would appoint a Special Assistant on the People Living With Disability.

He added that the association would be provided with a bus to help it with the movement of its members.

The governor called on members of

the association to go all out on the 18th of March and vote for candidates of the All Progressives Congress (APC) all through.

In a related development, the Organised Labour in the state has also thrown its weight behind the re-election bid of Governor Abiodun.

Leading the new state executive members of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Ogun State chapter, the National Treasurer of the NLC and the President, Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), Akeem Ambali, on courtesy visit to the governor at his Iperu-Remo residence, lauded the state government for its worker-friendly policies, declaring that Ogun NLC was solidly behind Abiodun.

He said that the NLC, as partners in progress, it was imperative for labour leaders to show solidarity and chart a course with the government in power.

Ambali commended the governor for the giant strides recorded in all sectors of the state economy, assuring him of the workers' support in the forthcoming governorship and House of Assembly elections.

The newly elected chairman of Ogun NLC, Hameed Benco, said that the present administration has achieved greatly in education, health, agriculture, housing and in labour matters, describing the governor as a promise keeper.

Benco lauded the state government for being the second highest minimum wage paying state in the country, thanking it for commencing payment of outstanding leave bonuses, promotions, upgrading of hazard allowance for medical workers, among others.

The Labour leader also appreciated the state government for increasing the quarterly payment for Pensioners from N600m to N1bn, saying it would go a long way in fast tracking the offsetting of the arrears to pensioners.

While pledging the workers' support for the governor's re-election bid, Benco called for the meeting of labour and the state government to review the various agreements reached in the past with a view to appraising their performance.

On his part, the State Chairman, Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), Comrade Alatunji Ayuba, noted the revival of local government administrations in the state which he said are complementing the state government by responding to the needs of the people.

In his response, Governor Abiodun said that his administration inherited N86b pension arrears and has been paying N600m quarterly, but recently increased it to N1b, assuring that a substantial amount would be paid when the Federal Government offsets debt owed Ogun.

"I don't think any administration has had it so well. Without you, we could not have achieved so much. In the last three years and nine months, there has been a cordial relationship between labour and government and the labour has been so supportive.

"When we assumed office, I made a promise to be fair, just, equitable, accountable, responsible and to obey the rule of law. I also promised not to develop any part of this state to the detriment of others. I promised to complete abandoned projects that have a director impact on our people.

"The 50 Women Leading Change in Africa list comprised of women from different industries – finance, oil and gas, infrastructure, government and healthcare amongst others," Olaniyan said.

Some of the recipients are Omobolanle Victor-Laniyan of Access Corporation; Prof Sade Ogunsola of University of Lagos; Confidence Staveley of Cybersafe Foundation; Elizabeth Talatu of SID Initiative; Funke Treasure of Sanitary Pad Media Campaign, and many more amazing women.

"There is no better time to re-confirm our commitment to supporting an equal future for women in Africa than International Women's Day. These women have continued to raise the bar and have fast become change leaders in their respective industries and we are glad we get to celebrate them in this special month," he said.

IWD: Grant Thornton pushes for parity

...as progress on women in senior leadership keeps stalling

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

Grant Thornton's 2023 International Business Report (IBR) research into women in business in the global mid-market has shown that not much progress has been recorded in the status of women in senior leadership cadre.

Making the report public as part of the activities to mark the 2023 International Women's Day, Grant Thornton in a statement said: "A pandemic-prompted change in working practices has brought about only slight progress for women in senior leadership positions."

It further expressed concerns that "Unless businesses develop cultures that empower people through flexible ways of working and take additional steps to support women into senior leadership positions, only 34percent of senior leadership positions in mid-market businesses globally will be held by women in 2025."

It noted that "While progress on the overall number of women in senior leadership continues, Grant Thornton's latest research reveals it has been slow, increasing only half a percentage point to 32.4percent in the past year, and only 13percent since the research was first undertaken in 2003.

"The 30percent threshold was seen as a 'tipping point' which would trigger an acceleration toward more gender-balanced workplaces. Given the incremental change since mid-market businesses in our research reached 30percent it is clear we now need to inject greater determination to fully reap the benefits of diversity."

The statement quoted the Managing partner/CEO of Grant Thornton Nigeria as challenging the mid-market players in the country to make concerted efforts to empower women in their organisations to aspire and be engaged in senior roles in the corporate environment.

"Parity is the way to go; it is about achieving equality, equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the corporate environment; let's consolidate the gains from breaking gender bias and increase the pace to more sustainable businesses," she said.

Karitha Ericson, the global leader of Grant Thornton network capability and culture, who reiterated the call, said: "The increasing emphasis on corporate responsibility and global standards is putting pressure on firms to form diverse leadership teams, and not doing so will make it more difficult to raise capital and attract investors."

The research shows that many mid-market businesses have focused on succession planning to get more women into senior leadership positions, including implementing programmes for mentoring, coaching, leadership development, and wellbeing.

Businesses should now focus their attention on developing more transparent pathways to leadership and more transparency across recruitment, promotions, and performance.

"Clarity and equal opportunity regarding every aspect of leadership roles, from recruitment to performance reviews, is crucial," says Karitha.

The Grant Thornton Group strongly believed that "a significant boost to the number of women in leadership

roles will come from more businesses committing to flexible working and developing the right organisational culture to support it."

Grant Thornton's research has found that "flexible, hybrid and home-based models have the highest levels of women in senior leadership roles. In mid-market businesses that have adopted a hybrid way of working, 34percent of senior leaders are women, while in businesses that are fully flexible where staff choose how they work, it's 36percent. Just 29percent of senior management is female in mid-market businesses with predominantly office-based models."

Karitha observed that "With many businesses not embracing hybrid or flexible ways of working, women are being forced to consider part-time work, which could stifle their career progression.

"And businesses that don't have flexible working practices tend to be less attractive workplaces to senior women."

She also noted that amid a global skills shortage and talent crisis, businesses that adopt flexible working may also reap the benefits of improved cross-border working and access to a larger talent pool, such as people with disabilities, those living in geographically remote locations or those seeking better work/life balance.

However, flexible working is not without its challenges, says Karitha.

According to her, "Businesses which already embraced this way of working thrived during the pandemic, as they were able to switch to remote working quickly. Crucially, these workplaces had the right culture to empower people to work in this way.

"Organisations which look to work more flexibly now, post-pandemic, must ensure they have the business culture to support it. This includes building workplace cultures that guard against potential pitfalls of hybrid working, such as women being left out of critical relationship building and decision-making."

Overall, the research found that men are more likely to say that their business encourages an open-door policy among management, while women say that this isn't occurring as often.

Peter Bodin, CEO of GTIL noted that encouraging a diverse workforce at every level with a global focus on gender is a key focus of the Grant Thornton network strategy.

"Our commitment is to accelerate our progress in this area and to foster psychologically safe environments where everyone feels empowered to be their best," Bodin said.

According to him, "We know we must be intentional and decisive to push for parity, and other businesses must do the same to remain robust, resilient, and relevant in the ever-changing market."

"Greater diversity is a positive for businesses – it demonstrates they are ethical and fair, it boosts business performance, and results in better outcomes and decisions. More diversity from across borders also encourages a growth mindset – bringing wider perspectives which can spark creativity and create a better way of doing things," Karitha said.

"And if you want to be an attractive employer to good talent, diversity is critical," she further said.

IWD: Foundation honours 50 women for talent development

DAVID IJASEUN

Enterprise, Growth, and Opportunities (EGO) Foundation has honoured 50 women leading change in their current industries, in commemoration of the 2023 International Women's Day.

EGO, a development organisation with the goal of being the voice for women and girls in underserved communities in Africa, released a list honouring 50 women leading change in society.

Executive Director of EGO Foundation, Toluwase Olaniyan said that the International Women's Day was a time to recognise great women

and shine the light on their efforts towards leading positive change in their immediate environments.

"In line with the theme for the 2023 celebration of the International Women's Day – DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality, the women listed this year have taken countless steps towards levelling the playing field for women within their various industries.

"In creating this list, the foundation's goal was to specially recognize the efforts these Women put into Talent Development in Nigeria and to applaud them for the remarkable contribution they have made to change within the society

BUSINESS DAY

ABUJA ROUNDTABLE

PRINVEST

PROPERTY INVESTMENT SHOW

Theme: **EMERGING CITIES IN ABUJA**



ABOUT

The Property Investment (PRINVEST) 2023 Roundtable will address topical and salient issues in the real estate sector. It would also provide expert insights into the key opportunities, and challenges, as well as the role that government can play in creating an enabling environment that supports investment.

WHY ATTEND

Participants are expected to among other benefits:

- Gain access to innovative ideas and actionable industry data that would help drive their businesses and support investment decisions.
- Participate in robust discussions with Pension Operators (PenOPs) on Pencom Mortgage offer to RSA holders
- Discover best-in-class residential and commercial real estate solutions for families, investment, and businesses
- Engage with the Mortgage Banking Association of Nigeria (MBAN) to better understand its new role in the Pencom Mortgage offer to RSA holders
- Explore World-class products and services for builders and developers.
- Tap into financing solutions
- Network with consultants, designers, and vendors serving the contemporary real estate market in Nigeria.

ENTRY AND PARTICIPATION ENQUIRES

John): 08023165436 Bashir): 08027588990
 Prisca): 08039471113 Oge): 07039384138

SPECIAL GUEST OF HONOUR



Hon. Umar El-Yakub
 Hon. Minister of State
 Works and Housing

SPEAKERS



Alhaji Aliyu Wamakko
 President, Real Estate Developers
 Association of Nigeria (REDAN)



Bldr. Lawal Magaji
 Managing Director/CEO
 Abuja Property Development
 Company



Mrs. Saadiya Aliyu-Aminu
 Managing Director
 Urban Shelter Ltd.

SPEAKER / PANELIST



Mr Olayinka Braimoh
 Chief Executive Officer,
 Hall 7



Prof. Uchenna Joseph Uwaleke
 Department of Banking & Finance,
 Nasarawa State University,
 Keffi, Nasarawa State.

THURSDAY | **MARCH**
16 | 2023

**Chelsea Hotel,
 Central Area, Abuja.**

News

Election fever: Wike approves promotion for Rivers' civil servants

...As NLC, others rally electoral support for Fubara

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The much-awaited demand for promotion of civil servants in Rivers State may have received boost as Gov Nyesom Wike says his administration will implement outstanding promotion in the State Civil Service and fulfil the promise of employing ten thousand youths into the service.

To make good the promise, Wike said he has forwarded the list of members of the Civil Service Commission immediately to the State House of Assembly for screening, because they will oversee the process to fruition.

Governor Wike spoke on Thursday when he received on courtesy visit a delegation led by the chairman of the Rivers State branch of Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Alex Agwanwor, and the chairman of the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC), Emechete Chuku at Government House in Port Harcourt.

Gov Wike accused the

former leader of NLC in the State, Beatrice Itubo, of peddling lies against his administration that pensioners were owed 15 months of entitlements.

"We have been paying pension and gratuities every month. Not less than N3billion Naira is set aside for that purpose, including payment of benefits.

"In fact, the former Accountant General of the State told me yesterday that those of 2016 and 2017 have been cleared, but you hear her (Beatrice Itubo) go to say that we have not paid for 15 months. That is unfair.

"How will a government, it has never happened in this State, that built a secretariat for NLC and TUC at the same time be anti-labour?"

Wike noted that Itubo was also involved in other antagonistic activities that totally destroyed the cordial relationship that once existed between workers and the State government.

Wike blamed her for the delay workers had witnessed in getting their due promotion, but said with the new NLC executive in place, promotion will be implemented for workers



Wike

expeditiously.

"Now that she has left, to welcome you, we are going to start the promotion process. I didn't want her to take credit. You

should take the credit.

"So, there is nothing government cannot do for you if we have a good relationship. There is how you go about it. You

don't go about plotting against the downfall of a government which will also affect the welfare of your members."

Gov Wike pointed to the reality of the State Civil Service having, for first time, one of their own as the governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party.

The governor wondered why Rivers workers are not excited and enthusiastic about the opportunity they now have and own the electoral process to ensure that Siminalayi Fubara wins his election.

"So, I thought that the civil service, the union ought to have taken it up themselves to say this campaign is our own, that we are getting one of us now who will be in charge of the affairs of this State.

"The deputy (running mate) is also experienced in civil service job. She has also been a permanent secretary, became a commissioner and a lecturer.

"We don't need to come and speak to you. You are the ones to take it upon yourselves. Can we miss this opportunity now?"

Recalling his experience, Gov Wike said; "I am not a civil

servant, so, it even took me time to understand the rudiment of civil service bureaucracy and all that.

"Now, this is somebody who has passed through these levels; from the junior cadre up to senior cadre to Permanent Secretary and become Accountant General. So, who is more qualified to preside over the State?"

"It is not all these people who in private businesses. Private business is not public service. When you come in, you'll know it's a different ball game."

Governor Wike warned Rivers workers against supporting Tonye Cole, the Rivers All Progressives Congress (APC) who in connivance with the former minister of transportation, Chibuike Amaechi, sold Rivers assets and are currently facing prosecution over \$50 million proceeds from that sale.

In his address, Rivers NLC Chairman, Alex Agwanwor, said his executive committee was elected two days ago and they came to present themselves to the governor and pledge their loyalty to his administration.

Fintech firm partners SDG to offer Starlink device purchases, payment by instalments

IFEOMA OKEKE
-KORIEOCHA

Payfi one of the leading Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) financial technology company has partnered with SD Global Impact Services Ltd (SDG) to become the first Fintech in Nigeria to offer Nigerians an option to not only pay for the Starlink router with naira cards but to be able to pay for it by instalments.

Speaking at the event to announce the partnership in Lagos, the Co-founders of Payfi that "The benefit of the partnership is to offer Nigerians access to high-speed internet benefits with the chance to pay small small or outrightly with our naira cards. You can buy a Starlink router with either your Visa or Master card and pay either in monthly instalments or fully.

"Payfi has a history of leading financial solutions in Ni-



L-R: Philips Akinyele, CEO/Co-founder Payfi; Seun Sanni, COO/Co-founder Payfi, and Igbo Matthew, CTO/Co-founder Payfi at the event.

geria. Our buy now, pay later offerings have given Nigerians access to an improved quality of life without breaking the bank."

SDG on the other hand is a green solutions company with interests in waste management, mining and agric commodities and other forms of consulting. This partnership gives accessibility to Nigerians who want more flexible payment options for high-quality products.

By becoming the first fintech in Nigeria to offer this service, Payfi is offering convenience to businesses, SMEs, hospitals, and schools in even the most remote and rural places where traditional telcos might not provide full services. On the partnership the company, co-founder and COO, Seun Sanni said: "We understand that a lot of Nigerians and Nigerian businesses want high-speed internet but the initial cost of \$600

is a big financial barrier to accessing this device."

A according to him, "With this unique offering, institutions in the country will have access to the internet with about 104Mbps speed which will lead to better communication and productivity.

Sanni said that the benefits of the internet are immeasurable.

"With access to the internet, institutions collaborate globally, share ideas, and accelerate growth. But with the economic situation in Nigeria, the \$600 price for a Starlink router is too much for many Nigerians who need access to fast internet," he added.

Nigeria is the first African country with access to Starlink internet services but before now, with the restrictions on naira cards over dollar purchases, Nigerians have been finding it impossible to get access to this state-of-the-art internet technology.

BUSINESS DAY

THE FUTURE OF PAYMENT & FRAUD CONFERENCE 2023

Stanching the Leaks:

Digitization of payment & Cybersecurity Solutions

Register:

To attend the Conference and the Exhibition

<http://bit.ly/3Zv4tD>

For Further Enquiries, Please Call:
0814 481 2193, 0706 299 9744

Thursday
27th
April, 2023
9am - 3pm

@
Four Points by Sheraton,
Victoria Island, Lagos



News

Sanwo-Olu to aid PSPs recapitalise, empower waste recyclers

...as group canvasses governor's re-election

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu has proposed a 2023 budget to assist Private Sector Participation (PSP) operators in the state recapitalise by inserting new waste removal trucks into their fleet.

Managing director of the Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA), Ibrahim Odumboni, who disclosed this during a stakeholders meeting, added that recyclers would also be empowered to procure necessary tools for their projects.

According to Odumboni, the recapitalisation was aimed at improving waste management in the state, to make the environment cleaner and livable for residents, to cope with about 13,000 metric tons of waste generated daily.

He further explained that the recapitalisation would help to address most of the challenges facing PSP operators, including the high cost of new waste

evacuation trucks, which many of the PSP operators could not afford to replace their aging fleet.

He said, "The Lagos state



A cross section of the participants at the event.

government's plan is to provide the PSP operators with low-interest loans to purchase new trucks. The government will also provide technical assistance to the PSP operators to help them manage their fleet more efficiently. "It will also stimulate economic growth by providing opportunities for small businesses to thrive. By providing the PSP operators with low-in-

terest loans, we are giving them the opportunity to expand their businesses and create more jobs." Odumboni also said: "In addition to the recapitalisation, the state government also plans to empower recyclers in the state.

"The government will provide recyclers with the relevant tools and equipment needed to carry out their work effective-

ly. This will include providing them with necessary equipment that will help them to sort, process, and recycle waste.

"The aim of this initiative is to reduce the amount of waste that ends up in landfills. By empowering recyclers, the government hopes to create a more sustainable waste management system in the state. We want to create a situation where waste is

seen as a resource, not as a problem," he stressed.

According to him, "The recycling that was launched by the present administration has come to stay as we now have over 100 recyclers, who are into the business of recycling. Also with the support of the governor, we engage community stakeholders of the 20 Local Government Areas and 37 Local Council Development Areas to discuss sustainable waste management with them.

"We are in collaboration with our sister agencies, like LNSC, KAI, LASTMA and others to track, arrest and prosecute waste defaulters." The state government's plan for the PSP operators and recyclers was warmly welcomed by the stakeholders, who expressed their gratitude to the current administration for recognising their role in waste management and for providing them with the much needed support to do their job effectively.

Meanwhile, members of the Association of Waste Managers of Nigeria

(AWAM) in Lagos State have launched a door-to-door campaign in support

of the re-election bid of the Lagos state governor, Babajide

Sanwo-Olu, in a campaign, which kicked off in Ikeja, and would be held simultaneously across the state covering the 20 local government areas and 37 local council development areas (LCDAs), to sensitise residents on the need to support Sanwo-Olu's second term bid.

In his speech, the president of AWAM, David Oriyomi, thanked the governor for his unalloyed support, stressing that the current administration of governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu had enhanced the waste management system, with the incorporation of over 400 PSP operators who provide effective waste service delivery to Lagosians, adding that the campaign by AWAMN members for the re-election of the Lagos state governor, was being replicated across zones in the state.

"We in AWAMN have 100 percent support for the Sanwo-Olu's administration, hestood by us and we will always stand by him," he said.

LAWMA's executive director of finance, Kunle Adebisi, in his remarks, said the present administration had a huge scorecard in waste management, being one of the largest employers of labour in the state, urging Lagosians to show total support.

Women play crucial role in our success story- Fatima Dangote

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

Fatima Aliko Dangote, the Executive Director, Commercial NASCON Allied Industries, has said that women play a pivotal role in the success story of the Dangote Group.

Speaking via zoom to all subsidiaries of Dangote Group, on this year's International Women's Day at the Dangote Cement Plc, Kogi State, she said that the company provides equal opportunities for men and women, adding that both gender have contributed immensely to the development of the company.

She said that the company provides opportunities for women to thrive in their various fields, adding that it has many women in the technical fields who are performing excellently on their beats.

Dangote spoke to hundreds of women employees who attended the programme, and were drawn from the Dangote Cement Plant (DCP), Dangote Packaging Limited (DPL), and Dangote Cement Transport (DCT).

Declaring the Day open, the Executive Director said women can improve themselves through education, sensitisation, and innovation, as she commended the Dangote Women Network at the DCP Obajana for successfully marking the day.

In her presentation, one of the resource persons and Founder/CEO Outsource Global, Amal Hassan, pointed

out that proper planning and education were needed to help women achieve their goals, even as she commended the Dangote Group for being a gender-friendly workplace.

Also speaking also, Co-Founder/COO Piggy/Vest NG said technology plays a key role and can support women in their daily responsibilities either as a mother or as a worker.

She urged Dangote Cement Plc not to relent in its Gender Balance Policy, especially as it relates to encouraging qualified women in the business of cement production.

Chief Enterprises Business Officer, MTN Nigeria Lynda Saint said women's condition can be improved through innovative technology. Also, Chairperson of the Dangote Women Network at the DCP Obajana, Fatima Kabir Ikunaiye said the Network began operation in 2017, and that since then it has carried out several interventional programmes in the cause of women.

Some of the programmes, Ikunaiye said include: support for orphanages and vulnerable homes, sensitization and empowerment of women as well as training them on skill acquisition.

President of the Dangote Group, Aliko Dangote had said: "Within the Dangote Group, I am proud to say that women are taking up topmost responsibilities and are doing very well in contributing to the rapid growth and expansion of our conglomerate across Africa.

Corps members express concern ...

Continued from Page 1

how corps members were attacked, beaten and threatened. I heard some were even killed in the city centre here; it is an unfortunate incident and I don't wish that for anybody. I spoke to a colleague of mine who is in the far north and she told me that she may not continue because of fear of attacks by thugs or terrorists; another colleague said the same thing.

So, those corps members who were attacked, nobody was there to protect them, it can happen to anybody. So, government has to do more to secure us," he said.

The corps member also expressed concerns that in addition to their safety, their welfare was not catered for as expected and that many of them were yet to receive their allowance.

"The major reason why we are doing this is for the extra money, but till this moment I have not received payment, and I know some others who haven't," he said.

Also, another corps member, Palang Yinusa, said she had wanted to serve as an adhoc staff but opted out due to security concerns.

"I was really worried about political thugs and violence that may break out which eventually happened. This presidential race was so competitive and you could perceive the desperation of politicians. My parents also

discouraged me from the idea," she said.

Some public affairs analysts and education experts are also concerned about the safety of corps members.

While condemning the attacks, Ronald Timipre, a legal practitioner, also condemned the use of corps members in elections. "Election in Nigeria is characterised with violence and I totally condemn the use of Corps members as electoral officers. These are graduates with high hopes and dreams," he said via his twitter handle @Ronald-Timipre.

Princewill Anyalaewechi, a former director in the Ministry of Education, stressed that security of corps members must be taken seriously. He expressed dissatisfaction over the conduct of the presidential poll. "I understand hundreds of thousands of corps members have been deployed as adhoc staff; hundred thousand lives are at risk and their future threatened. We must not play with the issue of security. INEC and security officials must improve on the presidential election and do better. The brutalisation of young Nigerians is totally condemned," he said.

During the presidential poll, a corps member deployed to LEA primary school, Lugbe as INEC ad-hoc staff was brutalised by angry mob on the suspicion that he was involved in the act of thumb-printing ballot

papers in favour of one of the presidential aspirants.

The NYSC officials however, clarified that the brutalisation was a case of mistaken identity, saying investigations found that the corps member was not part of the criminal gang involved in the said act.

Also, three corps members deployed to Warri were held hostage by the electorate during the rescheduled Presidential and National Assembly elections in Warri, Delta State. They were detained over malfunctioning of the BVAS assigned to them for accreditation of voters in the Itsekiri community.

Another observer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "A gory video circulating on social media captured the brutality of Corps members in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. One of the corps members (a male) was even shot and you could even hear the cocking of gun at the background by those that were threatening them to do their bidding. When I was watching it my heart sank. The shot boy was falling on other equally traumatised colleagues of his. Who knows the fate of those young people now?"

Prior to the elections, over 100 corps members deployed in three Local Government Areas of Imo State withdrew their participation. INEC's Resident Electoral Commissioner, Sylvia Agu said the corps members cited insecurity as their reason

for withdrawal.

In response to the security concerns, Eddy Megwa, director Press and Public Relations Officer on Friday assured that the safety of corps members is guaranteed. He said the director general of the scheme, Yusha'u Ahmed, has met with security agencies and INEC to ensure that security will not be compromised.

He added that the DG recently held a meeting with state coordinator to return the security situation and provide guidance.

Megwa, also assured that corps members will not be deployed to identified flashpoints across the country, as other adhoc officials will take up their duty. The director warned that the management of the scheme will not shield any corps member that runs foul of the electoral act if found guilty.

"The Management wishes to once again admonish Corps Members participating in the conduct of the general elections to ensure the highest degree of neutrality and discipline in their approach to the national assignment, as membership of the Corps cannot prevent them from prosecution if there is infraction to the Electoral Act," he stated. On the welfare and payment of corps members allowance, he informed that INEC commenced payment on Tuesday and corps members yet to be credited are probably delayed by poor bank network.

MOVE WITH THE TIMES



The new app by BusinessDay intelligently brings you the daily edition of the newspaper straight to your phone and tablet. The new BusinessDay app offers you our past versions and the flexibility of also reading our online content seamlessly. The only newspaper that speaks to you, delivers our content in over 20 languages while on the go, and offers advertisers a video platform for their messages.



Now you can listen to the e-paper, translate text into 24 different languages



Beautifully Designed, Built for the best reading experience.



Get instant access to content from home and around the world!

Scan this code to download now!



Get the app today and move with the times.

News

Private sector can now sue agencies over bottlenecks, bureaucracy - PEBEC

GODSGIFT ONYEDINEFU

The Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC), on Thursday, encouraged private sector actors to legally demand efficiency and transparency from government agencies that insist on bottlenecks and bureaucracy.

PEBEC said that with the Executive Order 001 (EO1) in place, the private sector can now get the agencies to serve them rightly.

Jumoke Oduwole, Special Adviser to the President on Ease of Doing Business and Secretary to the PEBEC, said the EO1 has granted legal provisions to fight bureaucracy and ambiguity which has hindered efficiency and transparency in the public sector.

The PEBEC Secretary while releasing the 2022 Executive Order 001 (EO1) Compliance Report, said It is expected that the legal provisions will serve as a stimulus for a more transparent and efficient public service delivery in Nigeria.

"The codification of EO1 directives in the Business Facilitation Act 2022 is a major development in the efforts to entrench EO1 in the psyche of the Civil Service," Oduwole said.

According to the latest EO1 Compliance Report which

covers January to December 2022, the top five performing MDAs are the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB) which emerged first at 81.11%; Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON) (2nd, 78.68%); Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Council (FCCPC) (3rd, 68.37%); Nigerian Export-Import Bank (NEXIM) (4th, 64.59%); and Corporate Affairs Commission

(CAC) (5th, 63.68%).

On May 18, 2017, Executive Order 001 (EO1) on Transparency and Efficiency in the Business Environment was issued as the Administration's first Executive Order to strengthen the implementation of business climate reforms and to deepen collaboration among ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) by instituting a systemic change management process for reforms.

EO1 mandates MDAs to submit monthly reports to the PEBEC Secretariat, the offices of the Head of Service (HOS) of the Federation, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), and SERVICOM.

Oduwole encouraged SMEs and private businesses to speak up against multiple taxation, bottlenecks and corrupt practices that has been stiffening the business

environment as they now have legal backings.

Last month, President Muhammadu Buhari signed the Business Facilitation, Miscellaneous Provision Bill 2022 also known as the Omnibus Bill into law.

The signing of the Bill provides an enabling environment for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), in Nigeria.

The Business Facilitation

(Miscellaneous Provision) Act, 2023, is a legislative intervention by the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council, PEBEC, which amends 21 business related laws, removing bureaucratic constraints to doing business in Nigeria.

The new law promotes Transparency and Efficiency in Public Service Delivery and strengthens ease of doing business across the country.



Members of the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC).

WACOL urges stakeholders to implement policies that increase gender digital divide awareness

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Founder of Women's Aid Collective (WACOL), a non-for-profit organisation, Joy Ngozi Ezeilo has called on stakeholders to implement policies that seek to increase awareness on the gender digital divide.

Speaking at a forum in Enugu to commemorate the 2023 International Women's Day (IWD), Ezeilo who is also former United Nations special rapporteur on trafficking in persons as well as the executive director of GirlsWill Initiative said that such policies when implemented would ensure ICT safety for girls, especially in rural areas which in turn would drive growth, empowerment and infrastructural development to bridge the urban-rural divides.

According to her, there should be a deliberate commitment to encourage women and girls' inclusion into the digital space and support digital skills acquisition for sustainable development in the communities and nation at large.

She also identified social norms, religion and other cultural vices as some of the factors that hinder women and girls to fully participate in economic and social activities.

"These gender inequalities and blatant sex discrimination inhibit women and girls from active involvement and inclusion in the digital economy.

"The proportion of women who own mobile telephones, engage in innovative activities with a technology-based start-up and/or study STEM courses is insignificant.

"Women are not adequately



Joy Ngozi Ezeilo

represented in ICT jobs, top technology management and digital careers. It has been observed that men are ten times more likely to be ICT and hi-tech specialists than women," Ezeilo said.

The exclusion of women and girls from digital spaces, she said further deepens exacerbating inequalities and negate SDG 5 which according to her focuses on gender equality.

On the theme of this year's IWD celebration, 'Digital innovation and technology for gender equity,' she said it was strategic and instrumental to enable actors explore the impact of the existing gender digital divide and develop a road map of action for an inclusive digital space.

"Innovations and transformations through digitisation provide new opportunities for women's economic empowerment. Bringing women and girls into technology can pave the way for more creative solutions and greater potential for innovations that meet women's unique needs and promote gender equality.

2023 IWD: 'Fresh opportunity to highlight entrenchment of gender equity in society'

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Nkechi Ikpeazu, wife of the Governor of Abia State, has congratulated women all over the world on the occasion of 2023 International Women's Day, saying it has afforded them a fresh opportunity to highlight the need to entrench gender equity in society.

In a release signed by Chika Ojiegbe, the chief press secretary to the Abia First Lady in Umuahia, Ikpeazu said Abia has laid a framework for gender equity through the development of the Abia State Gender Policy which provides a framework for gender mainstreaming in the state.

She expressed pride that under her watch as first lady immeasurable successes had been recorded by way of strengthening institutional structures that could aid Abia women to achieve a lot.

The successes include

the aforementioned Gender Policy, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law which greatly protects women and the vulnerable, the female inheritance law that guarantees economic rights for women, the GBV response ecosystem and its robust structures which includes the Sexual Assault Referral Centre. She also introduced a very innovative system of economically empowering women who have viable business ideas by injecting funds and other inputs into their business. This according to the statement was to use the economic empowerment of women as one way to break the gender bias.

"We have held several leadership trainings and behavioural change workshops and conferences involving women to mobilize and instigate change in orientation and perception for our women, young and old, literate and illiterate, able-bodied or physically challenged," she emphasized.

"Particularly, we inspired

leadership, entrepreneurship, and intellectual adventures for our young girls in the area of science, technology, engineering and ICT because we are mindful that the emancipation we want may not come in our generation, so we have to prepare our young to create the change. That is why we initiated the Tech4CoDEV Women, the technology for Community Development Programme for Result which showcased innovative young women in various spaces."

Ikpeazu said the road to attaining gender equity required sacrifices from all the players including the men folk as all must make spaces for women at the table.

"We must make society recognise, appreciate, and protect women's right to identity and individuality, their sense of self-worth, their decision-making power, their access to opportunities and resources, their power and control over their own life inside and outside the home, as well as their ability to effect political and social change.

BUSINESS DAY



PRINVEST '23

PROPERTY INVESTMENT CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION



READY OR NOT TO INVEST?

NAVIGATING The New Prospects In REAL ESTATE



28TH MARCH 2023



9AM - 3PM



ORIENTAL HOTEL,
LAGOS, NIGERIA.

Register

To attend the Conference and the Exhibition

<https://bit.ly/3RZ7e6Q>

for Further Enquiries, please call, 07062999744, 09029010325.

News

Battle for 'settler' votes in Rivers rages as Wike, Amaechi, Abe address Igbos

...Amaechi: Ikwerre is Igbo, Cole's mother is Anambra ...Wike camp: We are south-south, we are not Biafra

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The battle for the votes of people from the south-east (SE) is raging in Rivers State as the governorship election drags near.

This could be linked to massive votes that went to Labour Party which came second in the state with 175,071 with only 56,000 votes below Wike's choice, Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

Those against Wike's interest in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) got 88,603 votes for Atiku Abubakar. Analysts say the combined votes of LP and PDP believed to be people against Wike's interest could overtake the 231,591 votes Tinubu got for the All Progressives Congress (APC) that he supported in the presidential election. The LP and PDP votes could get to 364,000 whereas the APC or Wike-induced total votes were 231,591.

With this trend and numbers, attention has since shifted to SE or Igbo votes in Rivers State. Governor Wike was first to act by summoning a closed-door meeting with 'Igbo leaders' in the Government House in Port Harcourt. Though no statement was issued after it, different accounts have occupied social media, some saying the governor threatened them, others said he entreated them.

Former governor, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, followed on Wednesday, March 8, 2023, with



address at a townhall meeting held in Oyigbo LGA of the state. At the meeting, the Ubimborn English Language and Law graduate said Igbos should know that he is Ikwerre and that Ikwerre are Igbo.

He said any Ikwerre man that denied his Igbo roots was being insincere. "My name is Amaechi and Chibuike; what is the meaning?" He also revealed to them that Tonye Cole's mother is Anambra, meaning he is a grandson.

At the end of the meeting, all trade leaders endorsed Cole of the APC and resolved to go swiftly back to summon meeting of all trade groups and tell them what to do.

The next morning, a pro-Wike group, the Rivers State chapter of the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) led

by Chijioko Ihunwo, mounted a summit at the Polo Club in the GRA I area of the Garden City.

There, several speakers and academics as well as historians made stirring speeches reminding the youths about the dreams of their founding fathers.

The chairman of the event, Tony Okocha, regarded as Wike's strongest supporter at the moment, quoting Franz Fanon, a revolutionist, said every generation has a vision; you either uphold it or betray it.

Asking the youths to ponder over and find out what the vision of the founding fathers were, Okocha wondered if the dreams of the founding fathers of the state were that the people become economically subservient to any race, nationality in the midst of

plenty.

"Or is it that our enviable social ethos, ethics, norms, and/laws atrophy into abysmal oblivion?"

He also asked if it was the dream that their generation be psychologized into docility by the nuances, indiscretions, antics, subterfuges of non-indigenous folks and foes who migrated into their communities.

This was followed by a lectures lecture by a UNIPORT lecturer, Gift Worlu (PhD), who reminded the Rivers people how they fought to be separated from the Eastern region where he said they were neglected and suppressed until 1967 when the then Head of State, Yakubu Gowon, created Rivers State out of Eastern Region. He lamented how there was

no representative of the area in the Eastern House until he said the Willinks Commission gave them a voice.

He said since Gowon created the state, it has been Rivers people that have ruled the state, except during military era.

He harped on how Gov Wike has fought hard to defend the interest of Rivers State, saying but for Wike, Rivers people would have been observing 'Sit-At-Home'.

He said: "We are not Biafra. We were in the East but we not from the East. Wike has seen the light of the future. We will go where Wike asks us to go."

In his remarks, the Rivers NYCN leader, Ihunwo, said: "We are in the period of elections and we need youthful people to govern our state. We must not give the state to

miscreants, we must not give the state to greedy people."

He went further; "We are going to vote the people who have the mind to support the youths. We have had the same set of people in government in the state since 1999. And the governor of the state said no, our generation is about to go we need younger person. And that's why we must support Siminilayi Fubara as governor of Rivers State.

"So we are going to elect a man that's going to continue from where Gov Wike stopped. We need younger people and if Sim becomes governor we will begin to have youths as commissioners not old men. So don't be deceived by faceless politicians. This is the time for the youths to rule Rivers State. So next week Saturday, come out enmass and vote for Sim Fubara." He said he a revolution has started in Rivers State carried out Wike, the pride of Nigeria. "Wike has worked and so if we want to consolidate on what he has done, come out and let us support sim."

Ogoni-born Magnus Abe of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) has also held meeting with the Igbo block in the state where he said every person in the state was free to vote without intimidation.

He said he received the endorsement of the Igbos.

Opinion poll experts said PDP's Fubara is leading with 20 per cent but there are 24 per cent of people undecided. It looks like whoever gets the 24 per cent might carry the day on March 18, 2023.

Ekiti to establish state wealth fund

REMI FEYISIPO

Ekiti State Government is set to establish the State Wealth Fund, designed to receive, manage and invest in a diversified portfolio of medium and long term assets for the state and for future generations of indigenes and residents.

The approval for the establishment of the Fund was one of the decisions reached at the meeting of the state Executive Council held at the executive chamber, Governor's Office, Ado-Ekiti. The Council gave an approval for bill on the establishment of the Ekiti State Wealth Fund to be presented to the state House of Assembly for legislative processing and subsequent passage into law. It would be the first executive bill to be presented to the

Assembly this year.

According to a release made available to journalists at the end of the executive meeting chaired by Governor Biodun Oyebanji, the Ekiti State Wealth Fund would among other things, build a savings base for the indigenes and residents of the state; provide for investments in the promotion of research and development in modern technologies and innovations. It will also provide stabilisation support to the State Government in times of economic stress as well as manage other funds and investments for the state.

The Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Akintunde Oyebo explained that the Fund is a clear sign that Ekiti State is not only committed to fiscal discipline by saving for the rainy day, but has also prioritised investments by

committing a portion of the wealth fund to catalysing private investments. "By sending such an important piece of legislation to the House of Assembly for consideration, Ekiti has again shown its willingness to lead the way on good governance and fiscal responsibility in Nigeria, Oyebo added.

In a similar vein, the State Executive Council also approved the establishment of the Ekiti State Environmental Protection and Watershed Management Agency at the meeting.

It approved the repealing of the Ekiti State Environmental Protection Agency 2009 and re-enacting of the Ekiti State Environmental Protection and Watershed Management Agency Law 2003. It also approved the presentation of the bill to the state assembly for legislative processing and passage into law.

Aseyin Stool: Oyebola commends Oyo govt, kingmakers on selection process

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

A contestant for the stool of Aseyin of Iseyin, Sefiu Olawale Oyebola-Adeyeri has commended the Oyo State government and kingmakers in the ancient town for the painstaking and rigorous process applied in the selection of a new monarch.

Sefiu, who spoke with journalists on Friday, urged all contestants to the throne to maintain peace and cordiality while awaiting the outcome of the selection process.

Olawale disclosed that the rigorous process nonetheless, the outcome of the selection would favour the community, as the approach of the kingmakers to introduce transparency procedures like open interview of contestants would give sense

of belonging to all royal house involved.

He therefore, urged the people of the community to support the kingmakers with prayer as their decision will have a long-term effect on the town in the areas of human and societal growth. "We were all living witnesses to the process that produced some of our forebearers as Aseyin, it has always been rigorous and rancorous, but



Sefiu Olawale Oyebola-Adeyeri.

with the approach used by the kingmakers this time around, we are sure of a smooth and pleasant experience.

"Iseyin people at home and abroad should please support the kingmakers with prayer so they may succeed to have a smooth and rancor-free process, I am a contestant to the throne and I am happy they have thrown the process open," he said.

Sefiu Olawale Oyebola-Adeyeri, who has worked with many organisations in Nigeria before relocating to America, was born on the 6th April, 1969 to the Oyebola-Adeyeri Royal family and has positively impacted the lives of his people in Iseyin community through various philanthropic efforts.

Olawale promised to use his developmental and leadership skills in management of people and resources to elevate the status of Iseyin among other Yoruba communities.

Train accident: Jandor calls for barriers on roads around rail lines

...Donates N5m to victims of Akere market fire incident

INIOMBONG IWOK

Abdul-Azeez Olajide Adediran (aka Jandor), governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Lagos State, has tasked the state government on the need to provide barriers at roads leading to rail lines to prevent accidents.

Jandor made the call during a visit to PWD, Ikeja, Lagos, where a Lagos State government staff bus had a head-on-collision with a moving train causing the death of some passengers, while many were injured.

The governorship candidate, who was later denied entry into the Ikeja General Hospital to see the victims of the incident, described the train incident as sad, and unbecoming of a cosmopolitan state like Lagos.

"The incident is so sad. I think it's about time we began to have barriers that would stop vehicles when trains are coming.



Jandor

"This is a kind of responsibility for the government. We cannot continue like this, there should be a barrier on the rail line, when trains are coming.

"I'm sure we are going to get it right, I will be going to the hospital to see the victims so that we know how to provide succor to them.

"This is getting too much,

we saw the fire incident that occurred in a market in Ajeromi Ifelodun Local Government yesterday and I would be going there too to see the level of damage. "We will get it right as a government. We should prevent vehicles from passing, when trains are coming," he said.

No fewer than seven staff of Lagos State government were reported dead and many others sustained varying degrees of injuries when a staff bus and a commercial train had head-on collision along Agege motor road in Lagos State.

The accident occurred on Thursday morning around PWD bus stop when the bus was about to cross the rail track when it collided with the train at the location.

Meanwhile, the PDP gubernatorial candidate has said that the incessant fire incidents in markets across the state would become a thing of the past under his government.

Jandor, spoke during a visit to the Akere Spare Market in Apapa area of Ajeromi

Ifelodun on Friday, saying that the incident is a proof that some people were hell bent on making life difficult for traders in the state.

The governorship candidate also donated a sum of N5 million to the traders to ameliorate their loss in the fire incident, while promising to rebuild the market if he is elected as governor in the 2023 election.

According to Jandor, "I want to assure you that by His grace, after this coming Saturday election, we will now have a government that would protect everybody irrespective of where he came from.

"Enough of all of these coordinated attacks on people. It's unfortunate that some people would put themselves together and what they do for livelihood is to take the means of livelihood of other people.

"It's so ungodly and this has been going on for so long because the government of the day is protecting them.

"The battle that is before us is not just to go out and cast our

votes, it's also a spiritual war, we will call on God to come and prevail. I can tell you for free that this is not an accident, it is a coordinated attack.

"By the time I assume office as the Governor of Lagos State, we will bring these people to justice. All of them would be brought to book and I would parade them. I commiserate with you. Don't nurse any fear, Lagos is your home, this is where you live, you pay taxes and levies here, your children are here.

"I know anytime each of you visits home, whether Umuahia or Anambra, Nnewi or Ilah in Delta State, the next thing the people would ask you is when are you going back, which means this is your place and we will do everything to protect you." Akere motor spare parts market went up in flames in the early hours of Wednesday March 8, 2023, when some suspected hoodlums reportedly invaded the market and set it on fire after killing the security man on guard.

Jobrole unveils flexible human resources plan to deepen SME growth

CHUKA UROKO

Jobrole Consulting, a frontline talent management company, has unveiled a flexible human resources plan aimed to deepen the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria.

The product, known as Jobrole Flexi HR Plan, is designed to accelerate the activities of SMEs, assist small business owners in navigating common HR challenges while focusing on core business operations, and also to ensure high business performance.

"We are excited to introduce Jobrole Flexi HR Plan to the Nigerian SME market. This is an outsourced HR management solution that assists start-ups and other small-to-medium-sized businesses in reducing operational issues such as staff identity risks," Chigbo Okeke, Director, Strategy and New Market at Jobrole, said.

"The solution is also designed to assist companies in recruitment turnaround time, hiring costs, and

developing HR policies for your organization. These HR activities are vital business functions, strategic to the operational success of all businesses. We help our clients carry out these tasks and get them done without a hitch, while they face their core business operations," he said. Okeke added that "Nigerian small businesses must prioritize building a comprehensive human resources programme into the company's overall business strategy." This, he said, was critical to increasing their bottom line and capable of strengthening their organization's competitive advantage.

Some Flexi HR deliverables include staff recruitment, onboarding and documentation, employee background checks, performance management, payroll management, and HR policy development.

He noted further that the essence of Jobrole's Flexi HR plan was to justify that people were a strategic resource for every business. No matter how large or small a business is, there is always a need to use

effective HR strategic planning techniques to manage the company's resources and minimize human resources issues.

Okeke, therefore, advises small business owners in Nigeria to consider that HR role was key to their operations. "With the changing nature of the work environment in recent years, it is now very clear that the role of HR is very significant for small and bigger businesses.

This is because the value one or a few employees add to the business's performance is quite significant and immeasurable," he said. Flexi HR Plan is an integrated human resources and business solution designed to meet the administrative needs of Nigerian small businesses and help them grow from sole proprietorships to flourishing organizations with select employees and clientele lists.

This introductory product originated from Jobrole Consulting Limited, a talent management company that offers innovative talent and business solutions to drive performance and acceleration.

Ndi-Igbo in Leicestershire make cash donation to two needy homes in Abia

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Ndi-Igbo in Leicestershire, United Kingdom, a socio-cultural organisation in the United Kingdom, has made cash donations to the Ngwa Road Motherless babies homes, Aba and the Special School of the Blind, Afara-Ukwu, Umuahia, all in Abia State, to support the management of the facilities to provide for the children.

Ama Okorie, while presenting the cash gifts on behalf of the group, said that it is inline with their policy, to support the less privileged in the society.

Ama noted that the gesture is an indication that the donors recognise the existence of the facilities and so feel their pains.

According to him, the donors are your brothers and sisters in UK, they would have been here last year December, but the fuel crisis affected their plans and they left, but they asked us to make these donations on their behalf.

"They recognise your importance and that is why they're partnering with you, to

see that everything goes well with you.

Ama noted that the visit, which is the first, is aimed at ascertaining the needs of the homes and commended the management of the facilities to continue with their good works.

Celine Ngozi Oluku, principal, Special School of the Blind, Afara-Ukwu, Umuahia, who expressed gratitude to the donors, said that the money, which according to his substantial, will be used to purchase food items for the children. "We are happy and appreciate you and we pray God to reward you abundantly".

Special School of the Blind, Afara-Ukwu, Umuahia, is owned by the Abia. State Government. The school runs Primary and special classes for the blind.

It offers information and communication technology (ICT) skills, Braille, craft, typing and mobility.

She however, stated that the school is in need of Braille materials, like Braille papers for writing, computers- both laptops and desktops, as well as walking cane, to teach those, who not have to know how to use it to walk around without

being led by an aide.

She also requested for a refrigerator to help them to store perishable food items, a school bus to convey students to occasions, as well as drugs and other hospital equipment to be used in their clinic.

She explained that they have an in-house clinic and a nurse that takes care of them.

For Ohiogu Udoka John, home officer in charge of Ngwa Road Motherless Babies Home, the gesture from Ndi-Igbo in Leicestershire, in this difficult time will make the children feel loved.

On behalf of the founder, the trustees and management and staff of the home, he said a big thank you to the donors for electing to help the less privileged.

He appealed to spirited and well to do individuals to assist the home in paying the school fees of the children, especially those in tertiary institutions.

This is as he also said that the children need school books, bags, school shoes and sandals, among others.

He also stated that they are running short of mosquito nets and food items, especially baby foods.

News

Why we will vote Labour Party candidate in Plateau State - John Metchie

DAVID IJASEUN

Ahead of the governorship election, John Metchie, prime minister of Anambra State Association of Town Unions (ASATU)

Friday, has called on Igbo residents in Plateau State to support and vote for Labour Party (LP) governorship candidate in the state, Patrick Dakum. The Igbo leader, who spoke in Jos described Dakum as a God-fearing, honest and kind-hearted gentleman,

saying that his experience in public service will stand him in good stead.

Metchie also assured the Igbo community that if Dakum is elected, he will protect them and their businesses as the LP candidate is a prominent friend of the Igbo.

He said: "This morning, I met with the governorship candidate of the LP in Plateau State Dakum and his Deputy, Edward Pwajork. Dakum is an honest and trustworthy person that has what it takes to pilot the affairs of Plateau State.

"Edward, the incoming deputy governor, was my senior in school and a very good friend. I can assure the people of Plateau State that both of them will make a positive change. "I call on all the good people of Plateau State and Igbo residents to come out

in their numbers to vote for the Labour Party from top to bottom," he said. In addition, Metchie assured the people of Plateau State that Patrick and his running mate will bring back the glory of Plateau state within the shortest possible time in office.



Civil society groups urge INEC to explain 'step aside' order on Abia REC

...say, development could erode public confidence in Commission

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Coalition of Civil Societies in Abia State have called on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to explain to the people of the state and all Nigerians the reasons why it served an order to Ike C. Uzochukwu, Abia State resident electoral commissioner (REC), to stay away from the March 18, 2023 Governorship/State House of Assembly elections.

The coalition, in a press conference, held Thursday, in Aba, Abia State, to review the just concluded Presidential/National Assembly elections, in Abia, urged INEC to explain the reasons for the alleged abduction of Uzochukwu, while the election was ongoing, by men of the Department of State Services (DSS) and the Nigeria Police.

They explained that their work in Abia State electoral space began before Joseph Ilo, Uzochukwu's predecessor, and have maintained channels and avenues, as civil society groups, through which they interface and interact with INEC.

Obinna Nwagbara, executive director, Youth and Students

Advocates for Development Initiative (YSAD),

who spoke on behalf of the groups said that Uzochukwu in a statement made available to them, which was also sent to the Commission's headquarters, narrated his travails and ordeals on the election day, when he was abducted by security agencies and placed under "forceful detention" and "false arrest" such that his detention, as he claimed, affected the declaration of results and pronouncement of winners made thereto.

"Why was the REC alongside his personal assistant detained, while the election was going on? Was the directive for the Administrative Secretary to assume the role of the REC from INEC? And if so, did INEC put up a release in public domain or official document addressing the unwarranted arrest of Abia State REC?"

"In his seven-page report, the REC asserted that the results as announced by certain officials in his absence may not have met the 'minimum requirements' and this leaves a lot to be desired. We are troubled to ask if the Commission would allow Abia democracy to be raped in the open this way!

"What surprises us the

most, and for which we seek explanation, is the 'step-aside letter' from the Commission directing the Abia REC to cease from carrying out further election duties.

"We are in possession of a 2-paragraph letter ordering this 'step aside.' The idea of step aside rings a bell to our ears as a certain military dictator who annulled the most popular, freest and fairest election in our nation's history used that expression when he sought leave from governance.

"Why will the Commission rather than address the alleged abduction and detention of its REC go ahead to order the same REC to step aside without an enquiry on his sudden disappearance on a crucial day of election? INEC, the DSS and the Police owe Abians explanation to all these. We as citizens have the right to know.

"They rejected this development in its entirety and called on INEC to: thoroughly look into the report from the embattled Abia REC, noting that the ugly development could erode public confidence."

To redeem its image, the groups urged the Commission to explain to Abians the reason/s for the "step aside

letter and to use its Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) or any other relevant authority at that to investigate the alleged abduction of the Abia REC.

"We raise these issues aware of the apathy it may create on the already angered Abians, especially the youth and first-time voters both now and in the future."

They called on the Inspector General of Police and the Director-General of the DSS to look into the alleged conduct and role of their personnel in the said detention and explain to Nigerians what truly happened.

Other conveners of the conference are, Nelson Nnanna Nwafor, Foundation for Environmental Rights, Advocacy and Development (FENRAD Nigeria), Onyinyechi Joy Nwosu, Vivacious Development Initiative, (VIDI), Okoye and Chuka Peter, Centre for Human Rights Advocacy and Wholesome Society (CEHRAWS).

Others are Cassius Biachi Ukwugbe, Human Rights, Justice and Peace Foundation (HRJPF), and Nnamdi Elekwachi, Society for Economic Rights and Social Justice (SERSJ).

Industries account for annual IGR of N20bn in Nasarawa

SOLOMON ATTAH, Lafia

Nasarawa State Governor, Abdullahi Sule, said that the state now has witnessed serious increase in its Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) from industries for the first time since the creation of the state in 1996.

According to the governor, from the time he assumed office in 2019, the state IGR has increased from N7.1 billion to N20 billion annually.

Governor Sule stated this Thursday, at the media parley to give account of his first term in office at the Government House in Lafia. He said, hitherto to his administration, the state has been purely a civil service state, which only gets resources from the federation accounts.

"Before I became the governor in 2019, Nasarawa State was not getting any revenue from industries because there was none.

"Today, I can tell you that the significant amount of our revenue is from the various industries we have attracted, that are operating in different Local Government Area of the state.

"We have raised the IGR from N7.1 billion to over N20 billion annually and as such we can now pay salaries of our workers for months even without allocation from federal government.

"We have Olam Rice in

Doma, Dangote Sugar Refinery in Awe local government, Flour Mill Nigeria PLC in Toto and Axman Rice farm in Toto local government and Mabu Industry Gudi, Akwanga respectively.

"More than 30 per cent of the Mabu being sold at the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja today is from Nasarawa State," Sule said.

On agricultural sector, Sule said, his administration had constructed many rural roads that is facilitating the easy transportation of people and farm produce from rural communities to urban centres.

"We have also invested hugely in security to ensure that farmers and herders go about their economic activities without any fear of being attack.

"Because of the enabling environments created by our administration, the state has been rated first in the production of sesame seeds, fifth in rice production, second in cassava production among others," he added. He also said that the state in partnership with the private sector is currently building a Technology Village in Karu to harness the potential in Information Communication Technology (ICT).

He further said that with the discovering of oil in Keana, the state would benefit immensely and it would boost the revenue of the state when the exploration begins.

Train accident: Sanwo-Olu pays condolence visit to deceased families

DAVID IJASEUN

Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, on Friday paid condolence visits to families of the Lagos State Government staff, who were involved in the train accident that claimed six lives on Thursday.

Governor Sanwo-Olu was accompanied by the Head of Service, Hakeem Muri-Okunola, and some members of the State Executive Council to sympathise with the bereaved families.

A Lagos State Government Staff Bus with Number 33, carrying civil servants and some dependants from Isolo to Alausa had a head-on collision with a commercial train at PWD Bus-Stop, along Agege Motor Road, in the State on Thursday.

The accident occurred when the Lagos State Government staff bus was about to cross the rail track and during the process, it collided with a commercial train at the location. Six out of the 85 passengers on the bus died while 79 civil servants and their dependants on the bus sustained varying degrees of injuries.

Governor Sanwo-Olu who was received by the three families he visited in Jakande Estate, Oke Afa, and Ikotun areas of Lagos State, commiserated



Lagos State Governor, Mr Babajide Sanwo-Olu (second right) commiserating with relatives of a deceased involved in the train accident, during his condolence visit to the family home in Lagos, on Friday, 10 March 2023. With him is Head of Service, Mr Hakeem Muri-Okunola (right).



9453: Lagos State Governor, Mr Babajide Sanwo-Olu (second left) and Head of Service, Mr Hakeem Muri-Okunola (left) during a condolence visit to family of a deceased involved in the train accident in Lagos, on Friday, 10 March 2023.

with the bereaved families and prayed for them over their irreplaceable losses.

He urged them to take the death of their loved ones in good faith and see it as an act



9185: Lagos State Governor, Mr Babajide Sanwo-Olu (third left) commiserating with relatives of a deceased involved in the train accident, during his condolence visit to the family home in Lagos, on Friday, 10 March 2023. With him is Head of Service, Mr Hakeem Muri-Okunola (second right).



Lagos State Governor, Mr Babajide Sanwo-Olu (second left) commiserating with relatives of deceased, Miss Aina Oreoluwa Juliana, a Youth Corps member who was serving in the Ministry of Education involved in the train accident, during his condolence visit to the family home in Lagos, on Friday, 10 March 2023.

of God.

The Governor visited the families of Esther Rokosu, a staff of Lagos Internal Revenue Service (LIRS), and 54-year-old Victoria Johnson nee Dada, a Social Welfare Officer of Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH).

He also paid a condolence visit to the home of a Youth Corps member, Aina Oreoluwa Juliana, who was serving in the Ministry of Education before her untimely death.

During the visit, prayers were offered for the deceased families, various ministries, and the Lagos State Government.

Tinubu's wife, Lagos First Lady, others visit train crash victims

...Present gifts, as state govt waives patients' bills

DAVID IJASEUN

Wife of Nigeria's President-Elect, Oluremi Tinubu and the First Lady of Lagos State, Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu on Friday visited victims of Thursday's Train accident involving a staff bus of the State Government at the various health facilities where they are being treated.

Tinubu and Sanwo-Olu

were accompanied by the Wife of the Deputy Governor, Oluremi Hamzat, and other senior officials of the state government, where they empathised with the victims and assessed their ongoing treatment at the health facilities. The hospitals visited include the General Hospital, Gbagada; Lagos State Accident and Emergency Centre, Toll Gate; and the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja. They went

on a ward round and got a first-hand briefing on the train crash and efforts to save lives.

Whilst commiserating with the patients at the Lagos State Accident and Emergency Centre, Senator Tinubu came across a 23-year-old man, Osita Anazi from Ebonyi State, who was involved in an auto accident and required surgery as a result of pains arising from clinical right femoral fracture.

Tinubu keenly enquired about his condition and out of

compassion pleaded with the young man, who didn't have the financial means for the surgery, to stay back in Lagos, assuring that his treatment would be sorted. According to her, "Lagos accommodates all citizens and prioritises the welfare and well-being of all Nigerians."

Besides, Tinubu and Sanwo-Olu commiserated with the families that lost their loved ones, describing the accident as unfortunate and deeply pain-

ful.

Speaking in an interview at LASUTH, Senator Tinubu urged drivers to be more careful and work to avoid situations that can result in the loss of precious lives in the future.

"From our assessment of the situation, we can see that the patients are in good hands; they are stabilised. We are not God but we are saddened by what has happened. "We hope that the drivers are more

careful to avoid this in the future. We commiserate with the families that lost their loved ones and wish those who are here speedy recovery," Senator Tinubu said.

She also commended the State Governor, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu, and the State Government for taking care of the medical bills of all the patients, just as she presented various gift items to the victims to aid and fast-track their recovery process.



L-R: Lagos State First Lady, Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu; Wife of the President-Elect, Senator Oluremi Tinubu; Wife of the Deputy Governor, Oluremi Hamzat; and Lagos State Head of Service, Hakeem Muri-Okunola, during a visit to various hospitals treating victims of the Lagos Bus-Train crash, on Friday.



Wife of the President-Elect, Senator Oluremi Tinubu; Lagos State First Lady, Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu; and Wife of the Deputy Governor, Mrs Oluremi Hamzat, during a visit to various hospitals treating victims of the Lagos Bus-Train crash, on Friday.

News

International women's day celebration: Group tasks Niger Delta women on productive ventures

PIUS DUKOR

As the World celebrates the International Day for Women, Niger Delta women have been tasked on possible ways to be skillful to support their families. The call was made at the end of a two-day training programme on different skills acquisition to help support their livelihood.

The Executive Director of Kehtkache Women Development and Resource Centre gave the challenge in her remarks to mark the International Women's Day Celebration in Port Harcourt, capital of Rivers State.

She urged the women to use the yearly celebration to engage themselves in positive ventures such as skills acquisition and meaningful ideas that will propel them to higher ground, saying that if they engage in skills acquisition it will make them to be productive in society.

The Executive Director explained that due to lack of financial empowerment more women became vulnerable



A cross section of women during the IWD celebration in Port Harcourt

and got sidelined, noting that with good skills women can reduce financial burdens in their homes.

She called on the women to use the International Women's Day to seek for collaboration with other stakeholders in the society to achieve their desire, while expressing the hope that with time, the local women can stand up and be recognised

and celebrated as many women have contributed to nation building in many sectors such as health, agriculture, among others.

She however, regretted that in politics the percentage of women's participation was still very low apart from in voting, urging them to correct the abnormalities.

Precious Ebeburu, one

of the women from Erema community in Ogba/Egbema Local government Area of Rivers State, said that she was trained on soap making, detergent and liquid soap, among others and that she can now fund her daily needs and upkeep.

She also thanked the organisers of the programme.

On the issue of land

ownership by community women, she expressed joy that through the knowledge from the training she can acquire land through buying, leasing by legal means, especially registration with Certificate of Occupancy, C of O.

In an interview with journalists shortly after the programme, Anastasia Amanikpo from Borobara

community in Tai Local government said that the training have empowered her to be economically bold to support her household through skills she learnt from the programme.

She promised to use the training to help other local women in the area for growth and development. Amanikpo tasked community leaders to take advantage of the existing law in Rivers State on sharing of wealth with female children as an opportunity to change

Caroline Ginawa from Korokoro community commended Kehtkache Women Development and Resource Centre for the skills training for women. In the same vein, Precious Goodluck said that the International Women's Day was a day for women to come together to celebrate their achievements and reflect on possible improvement.

The International Women's Day is a global holiday celebrated annually on March 8 as a focal point in the Women's right movement, bringing attention to issues such as gender equality, representative rights, fight against abuse of women in the society, among others.

Guber poll: Dogara, Yuguda in campaign rally to solicit votes for Bauchi APC's candidate

AYUBA MAFFI, Bauchi

Former speaker of the 8th Assembly and a member representing Bogoro, Dass and Tafawa-Balewa Federal Constituency, Yakubu Dogara, former governor Isa Yuguda has on Thursday went to Alkaleri Local Government to solicit votes for the gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Air Marshal Sadique Abubakar.

Dogara said that they went to Duguri in Alkaleri local government area which is the home town of the present governor Bala Mohammed Abdulkadir not for anything but to seek blessings from the traditional rulers, stakeholders and the electorate in order to solicit votes from them.

According to Dogara: "We contributed immensely for bringing Bala as Bauchi state governor but he failed the good people of Bauchi State."

He said that in 2019 before election, Bala promised

the people that if he became a governor, he would take good care of them on payment of salary, gratuity, pension and other important promise, but nothing yet changed "so we decided not to vote for him again but to support the right candidate of the APC, Sadique Abubakar."

He further said that "We treck during 2019 campaign and spent our energy, resources and all what we can do before Bala became governor but he woefully failed to perform as governor."

On his part, former governor, Isa Yuguda called on the people of Alkaleri and Bauchi State to vote for the candidate of the APC Rtd Air Marshal, Sadique Abubakar as governor and all party candidates to witness dividends of democracy in the state.

He urged them not to allow anybody deceive them by doing anti-party but should focus, vote for the victory of the party and to continue praying for the success of the governorship and state Assembly elections.

Ministries of women affairs urged to advocate for women participation in digital space

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

THE federal and states ministries of women affairs have been urged to advocate for women participation in digital space as it would boost digital economy.

This was contained in a statement signed and made available to the media by Nkiru Ifekwem, an associate professor and gender expert to mark the 2023 International Women's Day (IWD).

According to her, the entire world is going digital, adding that women who are close to 50percent in the global population and who also contribute in all aspects of global development will not be left behind.

Quoting World Bank in its 2022 data, she said: "Women in the world at 49.7 percent and the average percentage of population of women in most countries of the world is between 49 to 51percent placing female population in Nigeria at above 49 percent.

This data is trying to establish that whatever is happening in the digital world, in innovation and technology, women generally should be part of it.

"In spite of the fact that women make up half of the world population, fewer women have access to the internet than men. Women's lives depend on innovation

and technology just like men. Almost everything currently go through digital process and unlike men most women shy away from internet and this hinders them from developing the necessary skills to engage in digital space."

X-raying the theme for this year's IDW, 'Digital all: innovation and technology

for gender equality', the associate professor explained that the theme recognises and celebrate women and girls who are championing the advancement of transformation in technology.

The theme also she said hoped to explore the impact of the digital gender gap, examine ways the rights of women and girls can be protected in the digital space as well as address gender-based digital violence.

She further identified digital violence faced by women to include cyber bullying, cyber stalking, hate speech, gender disinformation, sexting, sexual abuse and cybersex trafficking, among others.

She however, advised that women and young ones should be empowered to prevent digital gender-based violence, adding that "equal participation of women in technology can boost digital economy and Nigerian women should embrace digital technology for inclusive innovation."



Nkiru Ifekwem

INEC: Wrong time to mess up with numbers

Continued from Page 1

ple the need for direct engagement with the political and electoral system to reform and get it to be responsive to their needs," Ikemesit Effiong, head of research at Lagos-based geopolitical consultancy SBM Intelligence, told Qatar based Al-Jazeera in early February.

In Nigeria, government and its institutions hardly get anything right. When they do get it right, the push back from those who lost in the process is fierce and flammable.

With a rich history of rigged elections superintended by corrupt election managers, the country's elections have consistently been widely disparaged as scandalous and not fit for purpose.

The February 2023 presidential elections did not deviate from Nigeria's best practice of vote stealing, vote buying, suborning election officials, violence and technical deficiencies. These are the norms in Nigerian elections; our best practice in election administration.

The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, under Mahmood Yakubu has since 2015 when he assumed office, been unable to creditably hold an election that has not been characterised by local and international observers as fraudulent and corrupt.

In November 2022, Mr. Yakubu, bragged that the introduction of BVAS and IReV, a technology to upload election results in real time, was to ensure a free, fair and credible election.



Mahmood

"As I have said repeatedly, the Commission's allegiance is to Nigeria. Our loyalty is to Nigerians who want free, fair, credible and verifiable elections supported by technology, which guarantees transparent accreditation and upload of polling unit results for citizens to view in real-time on Election Day.

"It is for these reasons that the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) were introduced. There is no going back on the deployment of BVAS and IReV for the 2023 General Election," Mr Yakubu posited.

On election day, the BVAS and the IReV failed to work efficiently, if at all in most places. It was a woeful outing for an election manager that is always long on promises and

short on results. The elections were marred by widespread accounts of voter irregularities, sporadic violence at polling stations, disorderly delays, and other logistical issues.

Nigeria's main Labour union, the Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC berated INEC over its inability to "prevent the recurrence in this election of the ills of past elections," adding that it speaks "volumes of its ill-preparedness for this election as can be demonstrated in the late arrivals of critical election materials to the Polling Units and the almost deliberate tampering of the BVAS in many Polling Units including the outright refusal of its operatives to upload results from the BVAS to the INEC Servers in total violation of the Rule of the election and INEC's own election

guidelines."

The truth about the 25 February election, Jibrin Ibrahim, Professor of Political Science and Senior Fellow of the Centre for Democracy and Development, posited, that "the leadership of INEC is guilty-as-charged for eroding the credibility of the election by proposing an integrity test for the elections – the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) and failing to deliver on it...The IReV component of the integrity test failed and therefore the credibility of the election was lost using the definition of the integrity test crafted by INEC itself. This failure for me is really catastrophic because it created the basis for loss of confidence of citizens in INEC and its processes."

Leading not-for-profit group, Yiaga Africa voiced ap-

prehension over the delay in uploading polling unit results for the presidential election on INEC's Election Result Portal.

According to the civil society organisation, no result was uploaded after voting and counting ended in several polling units as of 7 pm on election day. "Yiaga Africa is deeply concerned with the delay in uploading polling unit results for the Presidential election on the INEC Election Result Portal. As at 7pm on election day, no result was uploaded after voting & counting ended in several polling units," the post read.

Nigeria's tech savvy youths were determined to audit INEC's capacity to efficiently run elections in 2023 and ensure that votes weren't dishonestly allocated.

To do this, they built and deployed election apps, to track results real time, independent of INEC, helping to guarantee that results declared at Polling Units are fairly represented at the last collation point and to check where the gaps are coming from and demand for accountability.

The audit confirms that despite an elephantine N305 billion it received to spend on the elections, INEC is failing to deliver optimally again; Thus, wasting immense public funds. A visit to the Google Play Store show varied election-related apps designed by young Nigerians intent on stopping the stealing of votes by politicians. It is not just on online stores though; most election-related apps aren't on

online stores. They are convenient applications deployed by netizens to keep a watch on voting patterns, results and INEC. The 'Election Manager' app developed by Govindex Leadership, Empowerment and Development Foundation sold on the Apple Store, allows voters to enter the uploaded IREV results using BVAS, allowing for comparison with the announced results.

Early this month, Govindex Leadership, Empowerment and Development Foundation dragged INEC to court over the alleged criminal activities of its staff during the last presidential and National Assembly elections.

The group argued that INEC failed to comply with Section 160 (I) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended) and Sections 60(5) and 148 of the Electoral Act, 2022.

The group is demanding the criminal prosecution of INEC officials that compromised the integrity of the presidential election. For INEC, the actions of Nigeria's young, politically aware and technologically savvy population mean that its dubious days of electoral unaccountability is over, as it is being held to account by technology deployed by Nigerians.

No doubt, the outcomes of the electronic surveillance of the February 25 presidential election by Nigeria's young people would form a veritable part of the evidence of election fraud perpetrated by INEC and political parties in the courts.

International Womens' Day: Kwara Governor pledges continuous gender inclusion

...As FOMWAN advocates closed gap in digital access

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

As the world celebrates the 2023 International Women's Day, Kwara State Governor, Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq has congratulated womenfolk on the anniversary, saying Kwara under him will remain a record holder and positive reference point in gender inclusion in public service.

Every 8th of March is set aside by the United Nations (UN) to celebrate women's contributions to the society, economy, culture, and politics.

It is also an occasion to consider the steps taken towards achieving gender equality in all spheres of life and the work that is to be done

to guarantee it.

The theme for this year's Womens' Day is Digital: Innovation and technology for gender equality.

The Governor in a statement commemorating the IWD, reiterated his position that women are half of the human community and should have a befitting place at the table where decisions affecting them and their families are made. "I join leaders across the world to congratulate our women on this day. Whether as mothers, wives, or girl-children, women are unique in their being great teachers, pillars of support, balancers, and critical team players in every family and organisation. No society can achieve sustainable growth without according women

their pride of place. This is why Kwara has created a niche for itself as the prime promoter of gender parity in governance.

"I especially celebrate the great amazons in our administration who have defied all odds to contribute their quota to the development of our state on the back of their intellect, hard work, and team spirit," he said

Abdulrazaq shocked bookmakers in 2019 when he appointed a female majority cabinet (56.25%) to compensate for his party having an all-male elected officials in government — a feat he consolidated with the enactment of a law that secures at least 35% affirmative action for every government appointment in the state,

the first of such legislation in Nigeria.

The Governor equally appointed 50% female as permanent secretaries in what was another first in the history of the state. Kwara APC that he leads now has five female candidates for the March 18 House of Assembly polls, the highest female candidature in this election cycle by any major political party in Nigeria.

Drawing on Kwara's efforts in gender inclusion, the Federal Government has enlisted the state to the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) project. Meanwhile, the Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN)

says obviously, the presence

of women in any society always usher in many goodies.

In her congratulatory message, Nihma Labaika, Amirah FOMWAN Kwara State branch noted women make up only 22 percent of artificial intelligence (AI) workers globally.

"Similarly, a global analysis of 133 AI systems across industries discovered that 44 percent demonstrate gender bias; and a survey of women journalists from 125 countries found that 73 percent had suffered online violence in the course of their work.

"Meanwhile, from the earliest days of computing to the present age of virtual reality and artificial intelligence, UN attests that women have made untold contributions to the

digital world in which we increasingly live.

"While the IT industry often talks about inclusion and diversity, a persistent gender gap in digital access keeps women from unlocking technology's full potential.

"While it is pertinent to boost digital literacy level amongst Nigerians, it is even more important for women, in order to empower them for the 21st century challenges, as well as, positioning them for global opportunities due to the role they play in family and the society, to encourage women to aspire to attain peak in their chosen career. Brain is not gender related and knowledge is like raindrops, once it drops, any brain can accommodate it."

Editorial

Comment is free

Send 800 word comments to comment@businessday.ng

Publisher/Editor-in-chief
Frank Aigbogun

Editor
Zebulun Agomuo

Deputy Editor
John Osadolor, Abuja

Managing Director
Dr. Ogho Okiti

Executive Director, Operations
Fabian Akagha

GM Advert
Ijeoma Ude

GM Conferences
Obiora Onyeaso

GM, Business Development (North)
Bashir Ibrahim Hassan

Business Development Manager
(South East, South South)
Patrick Ijegbai

Finance Manager
Adedayo Adetoye

Copy Sales Manager
Florence Kadiri

Digital Advert Sales Manager
Linda Ochugbua

Head, Human Resources
Oluwadamilola Abifarin

Editorial Advisory Board
Imo Itsueli

Mohammed Hayatudeen

Afolabi Oladele

Vincent Maduka

Opeyemi Agbaje

Amina Oyagbola

Bolanle Onagoruwa

Fola Laoye

Chuka Mordi

Mezuo Nwuneli

Charles Anudu

Tunji Adegbesan

Eyo Ekpo

Wiebe Boer

Paul Arinze

Boye Olusanya

Ayo Gbeleyi

Haruna Jalo-Waziri

Clement Isong

Konyin Ajayi

ENQUIRIES

NEWS ROOM
LAGOS: 0819410685
08116759816
ABUJA : 08033160837

ADVERTISING
01-2799110
08033225506

SUBSCRIPTIONS
01-2799101
07032496069
07054563299

Digital Services
08026011296

The Brook,
6 Point Road, GRA, Apapa, Lagos,
Nigeria.
01-2799100
www.businessday.ng

Legal Advisers
The Law Union

The perils of an overtaxed private sector

Private sector players are having to contend with a rash of new taxes unleashed by the federal government, even when many businesses are yet to fully recover from the COVID pandemic. It is leaving the majority of the companies needing to introduce radical measures to survive.

In the 2022 finance act, which has been touted with an ambitious plan to bring all sectors of the economy into the tax net, it included Capital Gains Tax from digital assets, Cable Undertakings, Lottery and Gaming Businesses. These join a long list of others from stamp duties, companies' income tax, capital gains tax, excise duties on tobacco, alcohol, carbonated drinks, and luxury items as well as a value-added tax on social media adverts.

Nigeria's ease of doing business ranking is far from impressive and the recent corruption index that placed Nigeria as the second most corrupt country in West Africa compels us to question the rationale for imposing new taxes on businesses that are yet to recover from the impact of the pandemic. And given

that the proceeds of these taxes have found their way into private pockets via existing revenue leakages, one wonders whether the government is truly placing its priorities in the right direction.

Zainab Ahmed, Minister of Finance always makes the argument that Nigeria needs to widen taxation because the country has one of the lowest tax to GDP ratios at 6.1 percent compared to the more than 10 percent average rate of many countries in Africa.

It should also be noted that Nigeria's tax to GDP ratio is disputed by Muhammad Nami, executive chairman of the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS). The FIRS boss noted in December 2021, that what is calculated as tax to GDP ratio is only the federal government's taxes and excludes the contributions of states and local governments in the country. The implication is that Nigeria could well be doing over 6 percent in tax to GDP ratio but because the administration is not conscientious enough to record the contribution of all the different tiers of governments, the country's tax profile is being under-reported.

Nonetheless, we believe there is no excuse to overburden the private sector with more taxes. One consequence is that businesses will be adversely affected.

Moreover, at the moment, businesses in Nigeria provide themselves with nearly all the amenities that governments in other countries with higher tax ratios provide. The private sector sinks boreholes to provide their own water, buy different sizes of generators and expend money on fuel and diesel for 24 hours of electricity. They also build and maintain the roads leading to their offices, provide their own healthcare facilities, and importantly pay for their security. Indeed what the government and its agencies do is rent-seek on the private sector in a manner that borders on the predatory.

This is what Akinwunmi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank described as implicit taxes, which are levies borne by society due to either inefficient government or government failure. It is therefore important, he said, to make a distinction between nominal taxes and implicit taxes – taxes that are borne by the people but are not seen nor recorded.

"It has become so common that we do not even bother to question it. But the fact is governments can simply transfer their responsibility to citizens without being held accountable for their social contract obligations," Adesina said.

The private sector remains the

only hope of rescuing the Nigerian economy from the myriads of problems it faces on a daily basis. The government needs to incentivise the private sector to create employment. But should it continue to load this critical sector with new taxes, the repercussion would only lead to more job losses.

Thus, while we acknowledge that tax payment is a social obligation that companies must fulfil, the government also must diligently meet its part of the social contract. There must be mutual accountability. Moreover, such taxes must be minimised with a view to giving the sector some breathing space. The government must be careful not to kill the proverbial goose that is responsible for laying the golden eggs.

Also, the government can look to bring more people into the tax net rather than creating new taxes or overburdening the businesses that are tax compliant with additional taxes. It can create more incentives for businesses in the informal sector which constitutes about 70 percent of the economy. This is to ensure it becomes part of the taxpaying community. Thus the overall is to widen the tax net and not to overburden those who are already part of the tax community. Evidently, this is one way in which the Nigerian economy can get out of its current straits.



Guber poll: Ogun Labour Party adopts Abiodun as candidate

DAVID IJASEUN

Ahead of the governorship election rescheduled for March 18, the Labour Party (LP) in Ogun State has endorsed and adopted the All Progressives Congress (APC) gubernatorial candidate and the incumbent Governor of Ogun State, Dapo Abiodun for another term of four years in office.

Speaking when he led the state executive members of the Labour Party to the governor's residence at Iperu-Remo, the state chairman of the party, Michael Ashade, disclosed that the good works of the governor and the need to sustain them till 2027 informed the party's decision to throw its weight behind him.

With Ashade were the National Publicity Secretary of LP, Abayomi Arabambi; state secretary, Michael Feyisola; Women Leader, Elizabeth Oladimeji; Ogun East Senatorial Chairman; Babaseun Ogunyemi; State Treasurer, Sobayo Olaniyi and State Youth Leader, Adebisi Adegunle.

Others are State Legal Adviser, Monday Mawahi; Assistant Secretary, Wale Okusanya and State Deputy Chairman,

Otunba Yinka Adebayo, Senatorial chairman for Ogun West, Olufemi Olusola, State Organising secretary, Tosin Meadows and Youth Leader, Ogun West, Godwin Adeleye

Ashade said, "We are here to appreciate His Excellency, our governorship candidate, whom we have come to endorse at this occasion. We have not had it better in Ogun State at a time like this, we as an opposition parties are not intimidated by the fact that we are in the opposition.

"All through the campaign period which is still ongoing, I don't think any party will complain that its supporters are being strangled or impeded. None of our candidates can make that statement. We want to thank you sir for giving all the parties a level playing ground, we equally want to thank His Excellency for allowing peace to reign before, during and after the election of February 25.

"It is glaring that all through the nation, Ogun State can stand out as being the most peaceful during this election period. Your leadership style has alluded to this and your statesmanship in leading this state on the right path has laid credence to that.

"As the Chief security officer, the governor has demonstrated that all lives matter and



L-R: The Ogun State chairman of Labour Party, Micheal Asade; Governor Dapo Abiodun and the National Publicity Secretary of Labour Party during the endorsement and adoption of Governor Abiodun for second term and the Governorship candidate of Labour Party for March 18 gubernatorial election in Ogun State on Friday.

everyone can say to an extent that Ogun State is peaceful and safe and we, even though we are in the opposition, we have come to say thank you for allowing peace to prevail in Ogun State.

"We have also come as a party to say we are supporting you on your bid to govern Ogun State for a second term. Even though we have lost, we

are not losers, we are magnanimous even in our defeat and we are lending our support to you."

While maintaining that the party's support to the governor was key and symbolic, the Labour party chairman observed that in the present Nigeria's political space, the LP has become a formidable force to be reckoned with as elections are

no longer a two or three horse race, pledging his members complete support at all times.

Ashade said that though no one is expecting Ogun to be El dorado after the governor's second term in office, the state is expected to fare better as his victory will bring another new dawn in the history of the state.

Also speaking, the National Publicity Secretary of the

Labour Party, Abayomi Arabambi, said, "I know we have one governorship candidate here and Ogun State Labour Party is here, we don't have any dissenting voice, we know ourselves, we have come to tell Your Excellency that you are our G governorship candidate because Ogun State must move forward, Ogun State must be productive, Ogun State must move from this era of deception of people that don't even know what to do for themselves.

"I know the only man that can offer us progress in Ogun State is the governorship candidate that we have come here to endorse. So, for us in the Labour Party, our own endorsement is not behind the camera, it is in front of the camera.

"We, the Ogun State Labour Party have come to say a yes to your second term."

In his response, Governor Abiodun described the Labour Party as a force that has come to redefine politics in the nation, saying that its performance at the presidential election has demonstrated that they would spring surprises, stating that their position in the elections however, indicated that it was free and fair.

"I thank you for the encouragement. Though I did not ask for it, you did it out of your conviction.

Pharmacists' group urges incoming government to evaluate charter of demands

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (PSN) Lagos branch has charged the incoming government to evaluate the charter of demands of PSN and change the approach in the appointment of ministers for the federal ministry of health and the chief executive officers in health sectors.

The PSN also stressed the need for the in-coming government to improve on the welfare of public sector pharmacists and the generality of health workers to stem the tide of brain drain in the country.

A statement signed and made available to journalists by the chairman of Lagos PSN, Gbolagade Iyiola, also called for proper implementation of National Health Insurance Authority, Act 2022 as well as enabling Local manufacturing of drugs and active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API), excipients and related matters.

While lauding the president-elect, Bola

Tinubu, the statement reads: "Pharmacists in Lagos State remember his interventions while he was helmsman in his first

tenure as governor between 1999 and 2003. In 2002, the Lagos State Ministry of Health had come up with a policy to privatise public sector pharmacies in all its hospitals canvassing a position that there will be no active need for pharmacy practice in the public service in Lagos state.

"Opinion leaders in pharmacy had to draw the attention of then governor Bola Tinubu to this heresy before a truce could be reached between the Lagos state government, PSN and PCN in that dispensation.

"It becomes imperative in this new order that confronts the nation that the foundation laying years of our current democracy where the federal government placed premium on the appointment on health administrators in key health portfolios including; ministerial appointments which were ceded to Prof. A. B. C Nwosu and then Prof. Eytayo Lambo, a health economist who superintended over federal ministry of health were widely accepted as the most fruitful and impactful years in the health sector in contemporary times."

Drawing the attention of the incoming government to

the vast potentials of the pharmaceutical sector, the health organisation said: "PSN contribute significantly to the real sector and ultimately National GDP through development of a petrochemical industry that paves way for true industrial revolution that will reposition Nigeria as the hub for new Pharmaceutical investments.

"The PSN Lagos state will be the fulcrum to engineer a development that makes Lagos, the centre of excellence, the favourite destination in pharmaceuticals for Africa in the next few years if the President-elect chooses to accept our modest challenge.

"We firmly insisted on better regulatory techniques as we strategised to work with PCN, and other strategic regulators. The voice of PSN Lagos state branch rang out loud for the enactment of pharmacy council of Nigeria Act 2022. I salute the leadership of PSN Lagos state and our members for the sustained advocacy towards seeing this to fruition. Our efforts to champion a sanitised practice environment in Lagos state and rid it of itinerant illegal drug dealers suffered a terrible setback midway in 2021.

Joe-Ezigbo, Osipitan, other top professional women for 'The Peak Performer' recognition 2023

SEYI JOHN SALAU

The Peak Performer (TPP), a platform where African industry leaders, culture shapers, and game changers gain insights to achieve peak performance, has rolled out the drums to recognise some crème de la crème in Africa at the maiden edition of TPP 100.

The event, dedicated to celebrating highly esteemed leaders across Africa, will be held on Thursday, 23rd March 2023, at the Muson Centre in Lagos, Nigeria, on the theme, 'In Pursuit of Greatness.'

Among the 100 personalities are the DMD, Falcon Corporation Ltd, Audrey Joe-Ezigbo; Group CEO of Great Nigerian Insurance, Mrs Cecilia Osipitan; Executive Director, Access Corporation, Bolaji Agbede; the COO, KPMG Nigeria, Mrs Toyin Gbagi; the Executive Director of Stanbic IBTC Pensions, Nike Bajomo; and the MD, PEFTI Film & Television Institute Limited, Mrs Abiola Adenuga.

They fall within 14 categories ranging from TPP Elite, Hall of Fame, and Legacy to Excellence

across multiple professions, among a host of others.

According to the Editor-in-Chief of TPP, Abiola Salami, "A panel of jury carefully selected these captains of industries after a rigorous process from the 1,683 entries we received across the continent."

The convener noted that these 100 recipients are being honoured for their commitment to excellence and sterling contributions to greatness in diverse sectors on the African continent. "In our work with leaders over the past decade, we discovered that if we genuinely want to inspire growth across the continent, we need to tell the authentic African story by spotlighting credible leaders with admirable skills on the continent.

"Therefore, in our quest to find these credible leaders, we called for nominations in 2022, leveraging the 27 Skills in Xceptional Leadership TM. This led to the 1,683 entries recorded," he expressed.

Meanwhile, TPP 100 recognition comes alongside the debut of The Peak Performer (TPP), a premium African thought-leadership platform that delivers content online and offline. The Peak Performer

magazine will be available in both print and e-version. TPP targets one million downloads for the e-version and ten million readers of the online platform within the first six months of launch. It's called TPP Project 1+10 million.

The platform kicked off online in early 2022 with valuable content for both aspiring and exemplary industry leaders. "Based on our overall goal to have inspired 1 billion Champions by Thursday, 30th November 2026, TPP aims to be the essential provider of insights to every leader seeking growth in their pursuit of greatness," Salami said. According to the world-class performer strategist, leadership development and leadership branding are two strategies global leaders leverage to record outstanding results. This is what we are birthing in Africa with The Peak Performer.

The magazine features inspiring stories and experiences of leaders in sectors ranging from technology; problem-solving & change; leadership & entrepreneurship; environment, social & governance; personal growth & transformation; people, productivity & synergy, among others.

Nigeria Decides 2023

More private sector operators endorse Enugu PDP guber candidate

REGIS ANUKWUOJI, Enugu

As the days are drawing closer for the governorship and states House of Assembly elections, Enugu State where two out of the three major candidates for the governorship position broke out of Peoples Democratic Party to join Labour Party and APGA may not affect the main party much because of the capacity of the candidate Peter Mbah.

This is because despite some civil servants who are seriously crying for their gratuity and pension the past administration failed to address and are jittery, majority of people from the business sector are endorsing Mbah because of where he is coming from as a core business man who out of the other contenders have some physical business in the state, employ people.

Among the groups that endorsed Peter Mbah for the governor of Enugu for the 2023 is the Enugu Investors Forum, EIF, in collaboration with the Enugu Concerned Citizens Initiative, ECCI.

The group which spoke to BusinessDay in Enugu recently said that Mbah was endorsed because of their belief in his pedigree in the private sector and a man who speaks the same language with them as investors.

The President of the Enugu Investors Forum who also is the publisher of Ikeumba Magazine, Ayobanna Ikeumba, told our reporter that the decision to endorse Mbah was reached after an unbiased examination and evaluation of the track records, manifestos and physical investments of all the governorship candidates in the race for the Lion Building Enugu.



Peter Mbah

According to him, their members are all over the world and are made up of people with tangible businesses in Enugu State both indigene and non indigene, promised that once Mbah wins as a Governor their members would immediately build 10,000 affordable housing units in Enugu within the first one year.

The group believed that with Mbah's background as a business man from the private sector, his administration would open the doors for investors and create an enabling environment for business to grow in

the state.

The president explained how Mbah was chosen, saying that the group did a critical analysis of the other governorship candidates and discovered that none of them has any tangible investment that any man could point at in Enugu.

He said that it was during the evaluation carried out without any bias that the forum and ECCI, came to the conclusion that Peter Mbah is the most credible, capable and qualified candidate coming from the side of investors

"We have reviewed other candidates but we found it difficult to pinpoint tangible investments they have made but we could not see any," he said.

The state had a lot of setback in the last administration because the leadership did not fully come from the private sector, most states that did well did so because they have leaders that have proven integrity in the private sector.

"Over the last seven months, we have been apprehensive over government and investors relationship in Enugu but today we have settled that if Mbah becomes the governor of Enugu state the slow entry of investors into the town would stop and Enugu state would be at peace with investors and their investments," Ikeumba said.

Earlier, the Director General of Enugu Concerns Citizens Initiative ECCI, Aurther Edeh said the dinner was to bring like minds together to think about a sustainable economic evolution of Enugu State a partnership of potential synergy bringing the government and private sectors together in other to creating of wealth for our people making Enugu state and industrial hub where business thrives.

Enugu concerns Citizens initiative ECCI as an organisation has its aim and objectives basically on creating wealth both for its members and the general public with membership base in all the 17 local government areas and its communities with members from various works of lives and industries

He said that Enugu is a green field where both local and international organisations can cultivate effectively but the government of course has to create

the enabling environment that would make it accessible for investment.

"This of course is our interest as concerned citizens to ensure in the fourth coming election that we elect a more competent experience and intelligent leader who has the capacity to provide the environment that would help to facilitate economic development, evolution and empowerment for the Enugu people," the DG said.

Also, a practising Lawyer in Enugu State, Peter Aja in an exclusive interview with BusinessDay, said that the people of Enugu State should now settle for capacity not party, he listed some virtues of the PDP governorship candidate which are not hyped.

He said before now Mbah had done a lot of developments, mostly in the rural areas that are not being used for campaigns and "I am sure many politicians would have used them to seek votes. But, Mbah never referred to them and that is the kind of person Enugu needs.

"Listening to his manifesto will always convince anyone that he has solutions to the challenges of Enugu state."

Aja further said that Mbah's antecedents and character made him unique, and urged Ndi Enugu not to allow the opportunity to elude them.

"Mbah is the reason why many are going to school today. He provides scholarships. He is why his community has access roads and even built hospitals for his community and others," he said.

"It is on record that Peter Mbah's contributions in rural development, as well as human capital development even as an entrepreneur, have not been in the public domain," Aja said.

Amaechi rouses Ikokwu spare parts, other trading zones in PH for votes

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

As attention shifts to traders as potential voting blocs, the former minister of Transportation and erstwhile governor of Rivers State, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, has urged voters in the state to mobilise votes for his party's candidates.

Other political big wigs in the state have also visited or invited Igbos and business groups to negotiate for block votes eyeing the 175,000 votes Labour Party garnered in the state on February 25, 2023.

Amaechi told the various groups to vote for a governorship candidate of character and one who has the fear of God as governor of the State. According to him, that person is Tonye Cole, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

Amaechi made the call on Thursday, March 9, 2023, when he visited traders and artisans in Elekahia mechanic village, Ikoku, Ojoto, Okija and other parts of Diobu. They all testified of his passion and achievements during his time as Governor of the State.

The traders pledged their support for the APC's Cole, stating that



Former Minister of Transportation, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, campaigns for the Rivers State governorship candidate of the APC, at Elekahia Mechanic Village, Ikoku Spare Parts Market, Ojoto, Okija and other parts of D/Line-Diobu axis in Port Harcourt.

lessons have been learnt from their experiences under the current leadership of the PDP in Rivers State.

Addressing the automobile dealers and technicians at Elekahia Mechanic Village, Amaechi said, "Don't let a politician buy your conscience. Once they buy your conscience, they leave you. Vote for the right person who will remember you.

"With my knowledge of Tonye (Cole), he will keep to his promise. He will not abuse you or your parents. Those are not issues of governance. Governance is a serious job,

that's why a governor is called 'his excellency'. For you to be called Excellency, you must be an excellent man all round. An excellent man is honest.

"So go and put your vote for APC and protect your votes. In the previous election, they told us vote and go home, it will be uploaded, the next thing, they told us the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) failed. This time, whether it fails or not, we will be there. The reason why you need to be there is, your life depends on who becomes governor of Rivers State, because you live here and do

business here, so you have a right to choose who that person is."

He went on: "I say to you again, any man who has no shame and does not have the fear of God, don't vote for them. Tonye (Cole) has the fear of God. Vote for him."

In Ikoku, he told the spare parts dealers, "Remember I was to build a flyover here, but I said to you, I would not do it until I build another place where you can stay comfortably. The reason why I said that was because, I was your neighbour, I lived at Chigbu Street, I schooled at Sacred Heart Secondary School, Azikiwe. So I know poverty, I know what it is that most of you are going through.

"Some of you are millionaires, but majority of you are like me who passed through suffering. I knew that chasing you out of Ikoku without a proper alternative was wickedness, so I cancelled that project (the proposed flyover) until we finished. We acquired land between Oyigbo and El-eme, 90 hectares. We were to do road, water, light, build houses for you to live, build primary and secondary schools for your children, and give you your shops. But the current government didn't continue with it."

Amaechi said the problem with

the masses is that tomorrow they can still come here and give you money to vote for them, you collect. "Once you collect, it means they have paid you and they will close. They can still come here and knock your shops down, you won't do anything, because they have paid you. But if you refuse to collect and vote for the party that will change these things, then your future will be assured. If you vote for APC, give us six months to one year, that place will be ready."

He further advised voters to protect their votes on election day. "After voting, don't go home. If you vote for the APC candidate, be rest-assured that things will change. Tonye's mother is Ikoku, therefore I doubt that Tonye will ignore you. I know he will not fail, but you must also trust us by saying to them, I must vote for this candidate."

Amaechi also walked through the popular trading areas of Ojoto, Okija and other areas around the D/Line-Diobu axis, canvassing votes for the Rivers State APC governorship and other candidates.

It was learnt that traders applauded the former governor and promised to do what he said. Other sources said traders contributed N20m to support Cole.

Nigeria Decides 2023

Election fever: Wike approves promotion for Rivers civil servants, but masses not impressed

...As NLC, others rally electoral support for Fubara

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The much-awaited demand for promotion of civil servants in Rivers State may have received boost as Governor Nyesom Wike says his administration will implement outstanding promotion in the State Civil Service and fulfil the promise of employing ten thousand youths into the service.

To make true the promise, Wike said he has forwarded the list of members of the Civil Service Commission immediately to the State House of Assembly for screening, because they will oversee the process to fruition.

Most Rivers public commentators have said they are not impressed. Many pointed to several times in the last four years he had promised to employ but did not.

Governor Wike spoke on Thursday when he received on courtesy visit a delegation led by the chairman of the Rivers State branch of Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Alex Agwanwor, and the chairman of the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC), Emechete Chuku at Government House in Port Harcourt.

Wike accused the former leader of NLC in the State, Beatrice Itubo, of peddling lies against his administration that pensioners were owed 15 months of entitlements.

"We have been paying pension and gratuities every month. Not less than three point something billion Naira is set aside for that purpose, including payment of benefits.

"In fact, the former Accountant General of the State told me yesterday that those of 2016 and 2017 have been cleared, but you hear her (Beatrice Itubo) go to say that we have not paid for 15 months. That is unfair.



Nyesom Wike

"How will a government, it has never happened in this State, that built a secretariat for NLC and TUC at the same time be anti-labour."

Gov Wike noted that Itubo was also involved in other antagonistic activities that totally destroyed the cordial relationship that once existed between workers and the State government.

Wike blamed her for the delay workers had witnessed in getting their due promotion, but said with the new NLC executive in place, promotion will be implemented for workers expeditiously.

"Now that she has left, to welcome

you, we are going to start the promotion process. I didn't want her to take credit. You should take the credit.

"So, there is nothing government cannot do for you if we have a good relationship. There is how you go about it. You don't go about plotting against the downfall of a government which will also affect the welfare of your members."

Gov Wike pointed to the reality of the State Civil Service having, for first time, one of their own as the governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party.

The governor wondered why Rivers workers are not excited and enthusiastic about the opportunity they now have and own the electoral process to ensure that Siminialayi Fubara wins his election.



Fubara Siminialayi

"So, I thought that the civil service, the union ought to have taken it up themselves to say this campaign is our own, that we are getting one of us now who will be in charge of the affairs of this State.

"The deputy (running mate) is also experienced in civil service job. She has also been a permanent secretary, became a commissioner and a lecturer.

"We don't need to come and speak to you. You are the ones to take it upon yourselves. Can we miss this opportunity now?"

Recalling his experience, Gov Wike said; "I am not a civil servant, so, it even took me time to understand the rudiment of civil service bureaucracy and all that.

"Now, this is somebody who has

passed through these levels; from the junior cadre up to senior cadre to Permanent Secretary and become Accountant General. So, who is more qualified to preside over the State?

"It is not all these people who in private businesses. Private business is not public service. When you come in, you'll know it's a different ball game."

Governor Wike warned Rivers workers against supporting Tonye Cole, the Rivers All Progressives Congress (APC) who in connivance with the former minister of transportation, Chibuike Amaechi, sold Rivers assets and are currently facing prosecution over \$50 million proceeds from that sale.

In his address, Rivers NLC Chairman, Alex Agwanwor, said his executive committee was elected two days ago and they came to present themselves to the governor and pledge their loyalty to his administration.

He noted as sad the sour relationship between government and the Rivers workers. But as partners in progress, he assured that NLC in the State will right the wrongs, return to that path of cooperation in order to attract better welfare for workers.

Agwanwor pledged that Rivers workers will rally support for Fubara to become the next governor of the State.

Also speaking, Rivers chairman of Joint Negotiating Council, Comrade Emechete Chuku, acknowledged the unequal infrastructural development strides of the Wike's administration and said it was sad that the former NLC leadership could not sustain a cordial workers-government relationship.

My administration will create sustainable, inclusive economy for all, if... Ombugadu

The governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nasarawa State, David Emmanuel Ombugadu, in this interview with some journalists, said that his administration would create an enabling environment for investors; prioritise infrastructural development, create business incubation centres and innovation hub to attract investment as well as wealth creation by leveraging on technology to improve agricultural activities in the state. Solomon ANTHONY ADGIDZI brings the Excerpts:

Can you share your plans for wealth creation in Nasarawa State if elected as governor?

Thank you for having me. My sole agenda is wealth creation in Nasarawa state. My administration will prioritize creating a conducive environment for micro and macroeconomic activities to thrive in the state. This will involve implementing policies and initiatives that will encourage entrepreneurship, attract investments, and create job opportunities, especially among the youths in the State.

How do you plan to encourage entrepreneurship in the state?

One of the ways we plan to encourage entrepreneurship is by providing access to funding and business development support for aspiring entrepreneurs. We will partner with financial institutions and development agencies to provide low-interest loans, grants, and training programmes for entrepreneurs. We also plan to create business incubation centers and in-

novation hubs where entrepreneurs can access resources and facilities to develop their businesses.

Additionally, we will streamline the process for business registration and licensing to make it easier for entrepreneurs to start and operate their businesses.

What about attracting investments? How do you plan to achieve that?

Attracting investments is crucial to creating a thriving economy in Nasarawa state. We plan to create an enabling environment for investors by providing necessary infrastructure, such as good road networks, reliable power supply, and access to clean water. We will also offer incentives such as tax holidays, rebates, and waivers for investors who choose to invest in the state. We will showcase the state's potential for investment opportunities through targeted marketing and promotion campaigns. We will also work to build a strong relationship with the private sector to foster part-



David Ombugadu

nerships and collaborations that will drive economic growth.

How do you plan to create job opportunities for the people of Nasarawa state?

Job creation is a key priority for my administration. We plan to achieve this by promoting the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through access to funding and business development support. This will create job oppor-

tunities across different sectors of the economy.

We will also prioritize the development of infrastructure and industries that have the potential to create a significant number of jobs. For instance, we will invest in the agricultural sector, which has enormous potential for job creation. We will also explore opportunities in other sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, and construction.

What specific steps will you take to make Nasarawa state a hub for economic activities?

To make Nasarawa state a hub for economic activities, we will prioritize the development of infrastructure that will support economic growth. This includes building and maintaining good road networks, providing reliable power supply, and creating access to clean water. We will also invest in human capital development by providing quality education and training programmes that will equip the workforce with the skills needed

to participate in the economy. We will also work with the private sector to promote innovation and technology adoption to drive economic growth and job creation.

What is your take on agriculture, in regard to wealth creation?

Agriculture is a critical sector in our plans for wealth creation in Nasarawa state. The state has enormous potential in agriculture, with vast arable land and favorable weather conditions. We plan to support small-holder farmers by providing access to funding, training, and extension services to increase their productivity and profitability.

We will also prioritize the development of agro-processing industries to add value to agricultural products and create job opportunities. In addition, we will leverage on technology to improve farming practices and increase yields. By investing in agriculture, we aim to create a sustainable and inclusive economy that benefits everyone in Nasarawa state.

Nigeria Decides 2023

What I would do differently as Lagos governor - Rhodes-Vivour

Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour is the Labour Party (LP) gubernatorial candidate in Lagos State. In this interview he spoke on his candidacy, preparation for the gubernatorial election among other issues. INIOBONG IWOK, who monitored the interview, brings the excerpts:

Has the postponement of the gubernatorial election dampened the momentum you had before the announcement by INEC?

No, we're very excited because every day that you give us, we get stronger; every-day they give us, we can engage more with the people, reach out to the people, get into their hearts and minds.

So, we're happy about it, you know most importantly it's not about rushing an election; it's about getting it right and that's why we've got the injunction to ensure that INEC actually follows these processes and it's also important that our presidential candidates also go through the process of getting all their data from BVAS.

It's not just about rushing to do something and rushing to do it, there are a lot of things that must be done right to put this country on the right course.

Your presidential candidate is asking for time to go through BVAS and the court says we need to ensure that this is done, because INEC has given some assurances that it will be backed up. Are you ok with that?

I am because I feel that the president of Nigeria holds a significant role, we must get that right. So, it's unfortunate if our president is somebody that was not elected by the will of the people and it's not someone that's a reflection of the will of the people and their aspirations for a better Nigeria and anything that can ensure that is legitimized and legitimate is something that I'm open to.

For a lot of people in your party, it was like a bittersweet judgment; having the election postponed by one week and INEC could actually still go ahead to reconfigure the BVAS

Yes, because if they reconfigure and data is lost, you know we have to think on the long term right, everything is not just about short-term wins it's also about the long-term win.

I need his excellency Peter Obi to get all his information all his data, so we can actually stand a very good chance in court

Do you trust INEC on this one?

After what happened on February 25, I cannot say I trust INEC, I'm watching, I'm observing, because I mean we have results from our situation room that gives us over 900,000 votes in Lagos, but you see what they declared is very different.



Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour

So, I cannot as a right thinking human being say I trust INEC, they are going to have to win our trust, but we are prepared for whatever worst case scenario and we're hoping for the best.

The irony is the fact that your party's candidates that won seats at the Senate, House of Representatives, went to collect their certificates which came out of an election in which your party doubts the process and even the results. What is your take on that?

It's a very simple thing yeah, the INEC chairman by himself promised us that there will be electronic transmission of voting results and that was supposed to take us out of this 2015-2019 type of elections, where there's so much rigging and manipulations at the ward collation and the local government collation centres.

It does not mean that a rightful person cannot emerge through that other process, you just have to be a lot more aggressive, a lot more close marking to ensure that nobody can get away with anything right and people will do that and emerge.

But there are also a lot of situations, in Surulere 2 in Lagos State, all of a sudden after the labour party candidates emerged the winner; they said he was not supposed to be on

the ballot paper.

Similarly in Ojo LGA, they later called it in favour of Labour Party candidates, in a number of local governments. In Ikeja there was all that delay and a lot of other problems with the electronic transmission of voting.

Because I was part of the Ondo election at the time, our party was

I don't believe that a military setup will come and start shooting people without carrying the governor along, it's not possible, except it was a coup

collecting results from the INEC portal and I truly believed our process had been deepened and had become transparent to a large extent.

And when you also look at the Osun election where Omisore went to the coalition centre and it was almost empty and literally they chased him away, it showed that they value the truth, the integrity of it had already begun online.

I'm interested in your candidacy, the many controversies arising, the primordial sentiments that your candidates have thrown up, they are primordial but then they are the people's feelings. Some of the concerns are that you don't speak the language, you are from Lagos truly but your mother is Igbo. How do you hope to unify Lagos if you win?

First of all, I am in the epitome of a cosmopolitan Lagos, I represent it, I embody it. I see what brings us together as opposed to what takes us apart. Lagos State has been in harmony for a very long time. What happens is politicians come and try to divide us and I always say people let us be wary of a politician or politicians that only remember that they are Yoruba when it's time for politics.

When Fulani herdsmen were making incursions into Oyo and different parts of the South West

and people like Sunday Igbovo and Rotimi Akeredolu stood up, a lot of politicians in Lagos were quiet and they played politics with it.

So, many interests of the Yoruba people were quiet because they wanted an alliance with the North. They put their political interest above the interest of their people and then all of a sudden it's time for politics and they remind you that this person does not speak your Yoruba.

With the Yoruba that they are speaking when they fired at young people at the Lekki tollgate did they separate the Yoruba's, Igbo's or Hausa's, all the thugs that are on the streets and have been speaking Yoruba for years, do they go and meet them and say come let give you rehabilitation or we're going to get you off the streets, we're going to ensure that you're more productive member of the society?

Are you implying that politicians ordered the firing of protesters at the Lekki toll gate?

I would say from what the army has said; Governor Sanwo-Olu invited them in and gave them the order.

But he's been clearing that insinuation; time and again, I imagine you saw the interview?

But what the army said during the hearing completely goes against what he said. And he is the chief security officer of the state and if he did not give that order and someone just come in and shoot like a cowboy you should be on ground as the leader of the state; you should say you cannot shoot at my people, if you have to shoot, shoot at me to get to me.

You don't believe despite what the governor's said, especially when you understand how the government works, and the chain of command not even with the police, but with the military?

I don't believe that a military setup will come and start shooting people without carrying the governor along, it's not possible, except it was a coup. I also believe that he saw the bodies. I believe that he was at Reddington Hospital; I believe that he saw the bodies and we have a lot of evidence on, so all this gaslighting that they've been doing we're just watching them.

Because, it's the same thing as they are telling us that the election was won by ten thousand when we know that they took out almost 50,000 of our votes in Alimosho and 20,000 votes in Ikeja.

There's a lot of gaslighting politics and tokenism that is a hallmark of the APC government.

Nigeria Decides 2023

‘Rivers not open to political interference to stranger-elements’

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

As voting day approaches, the warning has strongly been sounded that Rivers State is one the federating sub-nationals of Nigeria, “and is not open to political interference by stranger-elements that we have accommodated over a long time.”

These are the exact words of a communique issued at the end of a one-day youth summit in Port Harcourt by the Rivers State chapter of the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN).

The summit was convened on Thursday, March 9, 2023, at the expansive Polo Field in the GRA (1) by the Rivers State chapter of the NYCN led by Chijioke Ihunwo.

The strongly-worded communique said Rivers youth wish to remind their political traducers that Rivers State was procured by their founding fathers through grit and blood, over and above the political obstacles willfully mounted by those who they said seek to love the state more than the indigenous peoples today.

The statement endorsed by over five leaders said: “We wish to remind the delusional internal colonisers that the Rivers State of today is no longer part of the defunct pre-civil war behemoth known as Eastern Nigeria that allegedly brutally and unapologetically oppressed its minorities like a medieval potentate or absolute monarchy.”

Rivers youth summit strongly condemned what it called the unfolding political interference by a few semi-illiterates who they said masquerade themselves under diverse phantom political platforms through which they allegedly seek to heat up the polity and distort their collective identity under the guise of endorsing their preferred governorship candidates.

Many understood this to mean endorsing any candidate such as Magnus Abe of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), George Dawari of Action Alliance, Tonye Cole of the All Progressives Congress (APC) other than the one (Sim Fubara of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP) backed by Gov Nyesom Wike.

The communique went on to say Rivers youth declare that it is a gratuitous insult on their collective institutional memory for a few stranger-elements and self-appointed political midwives, who claim to know what is good for Rivers people, better than the people themselves.

“These political shenanigans should serve as a wake-up call to Rivers youth to be eternally vigilant, and vehemently oppose the antics of desperate politicians who are willing to kiss the devil in their desperate bid to occupy the office of Governor.

“Rivers youth should rally to political barricade and fully mobilise en-mass to vote massively for the



NYCN Rivers State chairman, Chijioke Ihunwo (r) with chairman on the occasion, Tony Okocha

gubernatorial candidate who will ensure continuity and consolidation of the laudable developmental strides in Rivers State that have been greeted with great aplomb and a chorus of approval from all nooks and crannies.”

The summit claimed that the youth of Rivers State have resolved to stick together and stand tall with the visionary and wise counsel of their revered leaders in the State. “We have further resolved to shun the lure of doing anything untoward that could divide or decimate us, either to advance the pecuniary interest of our enemies, or to gain transient power that would not serve us well in the long run.

“This is a call on all Rivers youth who play the despicable role of 5th columnists to retrace their steps and join forces with their progressive

colleagues in march toward total political, social, economic and cultural emancipation as envisaged by the founding fathers of this State.”

Candidates and their backers have been visiting various settler-groups to look for votes, seeing that the Labour Party polled over 175,000 votes in the just-concluded but controversial presidential election, just 56,000 votes below the score of 231,000 that the Wike-backed Bola Ahmed Tinubu got in the state.

The summit which was mounted close to the Saturday March 11, 2023 governorship election (which was later postponed) said; “We have also resolved that much as we would continue to tolerate, accommodate, and extend our hands of fellowship and amity to non-indigenous residents in our midst—within the limits of human endurance—we wish

to sound it loud and clear that Rivers youth shall vehemently, stoutly, sternly and legitimately resist any manifest form of external incursion, intimidation, and or attempted invasion of our political space by centrifugal force(s) that do not wish us well. We equally pledge ourselves to resisting all real or imagined threats to the hard-earned peace, tranquility and security that currently exist in our one and only Rivers State.”

Observers wondered what constitutes these threats listed about from non-indigenes, whether by voting for candidates of their own choices, it amounted to aggression.

Not attempting to explain this, the Youth body said; “We will not allow arsonists to offer to man our fire service department; nor will we allow those who have made their own states ungovernable and uninhabit-

able to import their programmed disorder into the serene borders of Rivers State. Issues that are indigenous to Rivers State must be exclusively decided by Rivers people without the intrusion of those who are internally displaced from their homes as a result of their intentional sponsorship of non-state actors.”

The communique said let there be no doubt that the various ethnic nationalities that make up Rivers State hereby re-emphasise their autonomy as a peculiar and chosen people with shared interest and common destiny. “We are not open to outside manipulation as was the practice in the past.

“We seriously frown at any slightest attempt by self-appointed ‘do-gooders’ to determine our collective future political direction for us. This land bears our blood and DNA; it must, therefore, bear our will. By fire, by force, if need be.

“Let it be known that the entire landmass, territorial waters, and continental shelf known as Rivers State is no longer available for internal colonisation. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

“A word, they say, is enough for the wise; and even fools can appreciate the depth of the anger of the youth of Rivers State in the context of this communique.”

The theme of the summit is: ‘Linking the future of Rivers youth to the dreams of our founding fathers.’

In the preamble, the communique mentioned the ‘The Rivers for Rivers Network’ as working in concert with the Rivers State Chapter of the NYCN which deliberated extensively on recent socio-political and economic climate in Rivers State, and took some far-reaching decisions.

The summit which was addressed by chairman on the occasion, Tony Okocha, a factional leader of the All Progressives Congress (APC) a university don, Gift Worlu, amongst others, considered recent political developments in Nigeria and unanimously decided to heartily congratulate the President-elect, Bola Ahmed Tinubu (BAT), on his victory at the just-concluded presidential election.

The communique said; “Based on his track record of high impact performance and installed capacity to build bridges across the country, the summit is very hopeful that a President Tinubu will usher in peace and prosperity to Nigeria; the same way he did it in Lagos as Governor between 1999 and 2007.

“The summit heartily and most respectfully salutes the Executive Governor of Rivers State, His Excellency, Nyesom Wike, for his tireless commitment to good governance and safeguarding the interest of Rivers State.” The body passed ‘Vote of Confidence’ on Gov Wike allegedly



Crowd of youths

Nigeria Decides 2023

Quietude after controversial poll: Are Nigerians gullible or peace-loving?

CHURCHILL OKORO, Benin

Since the outcome of the Presidential election became public with all the controversies, Nigerians have largely remained quiet. Why some have described it as a sign of accepting what has happened, some others say the last may not have been heard on the matter. They described it as “peace of the graveyard.”

“Who don win don win!” A pidgin English sentence that literally means the winner has emerged and I have given up as there is no way forward. These were the five-letter words uttered by a reader at a newsstand somewhere in Southern Nigeria after the declaration of the president-elect on Wednesday morning.

While others continued to express their thoughts and discuss the election outcome, the dispirited young man became pensive and gazed in a utter amazement at the front pages of the newspaper to see the leading candidate, whose victory had been confirmed on television at the wee hours of Wednesday.

“The memories of that day keeps running through my mind. Just imagine the joy that comes with the reflection of the will of Nigerians. Imagine the excitement that would have accompanied the announcement of the people’s president-elect. We campaigned, we had hopes that there will be a turnaround and a deviation from the past but, it was the same old story.

“We saw with our eyes how our supreme, collective power was subdued by the powers that be. The February 25 presidential election has further given credence to the belief that Nigerian elections are a farce. We only hope the court will become our last resort this time around,” the 34-year-old man said with uncertainty.

Citizens of Africa’s most populous country had been in expectant mode after the nation’s electoral arbiter, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), scheduled February 25 for the Presidential and National Assembly elections. The drumbeats caught the attention of many, especially the youth; pervaded across every nook and cranny, set discordant tunes among persons with different political party affiliations but, at the end, Nigerians decided.

Amid misgivings about the electoral process owing to previous election outcomes, the fingerprint decision process to cause a change of guard - though witnessed a variation from the anticipated turnout - took place across the country with pockets of violence and technological hitches in some areas.

On that epoch-making day, Nigerians had high hopes that their respective candidates would emerge victorious but it lasted for a short period of time when result collation started to trickle in from the 36 states



Mahmood Yakubu

of the federation.

Like they say, in any competition there is always a winner and losers. Barely four days after the voters cast their votes, they woke up to the news that a president-elect and Buhari’s successor has been announced.

Although there has been dissatisfaction aired through press conferences and pockets of protests over the end result, since the outcome of the presidential election became public with all the controversies, Nigerians have largely remained quiet and seem to have moved on. While some have described it as a sign of accepting what has happened, others say the last may not have been heard on the matter as the drama moves to the court.

The presidential candidates who didn’t receive the certificate of return have called for calm among their supporters while they focus on reclaiming their mandate through the court processes. Some persons are of the view that elections end at the polling booths and that anything that goes to court, in light of recent electoral verdicts, is always against the expectations of the masses.

This has further prompted the widespread silence among some citizens because they believe that the trust and confidence in Nigeria’s Judicial system have, over time, been eroded.

Little wonder, the Edo Civil Society Organizations (EDOCISO) recently called on the various levels of the courts across the country not to take sides in all electoral cases, especially the presidential election case as it will significantly make or mar Nigeria.

Austine Enabulele, interim chair-

man of the civil rights group, while commenting on the aftermath of the February 25 and upcoming March 18 elections, stressed that the impartiality of the court would prove to Nigerians and the world that the court is truly the last hope of the common man.

“For the sake of the safety of our lives and public properties, we like to plead to all aggrieved politicians and political parties to please jettison the idea of protesting to reclaim their mandate but rather put together all available evidences to prove beyond reasonable doubt and employ the services of lawyers and proceed to court as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended.

“We also want to advise the court not to take sides in all cases brought before them especially the presidential election case as it will have a long way to either make or mar this country Nigeria, and prove to Nigerians and indeed the world that the court is truly the last hope of the common man. The court must use this opportunity to redeem all doubts by the people about it,” he said.

Giving his report, he said: “On post presidential and national house of assembly elections, we observed series of unacceptance of outcome, especially the presidential results and winner declared by INEC which gave birth to protests and unhealthy utterances by Nigerians.

“Contrary to the expectations, the 2023 National elections were marred with very shabby organization, logistics and operational failures here and there, failure in electoral transparency, cases of violence all around the 36 states.

“Furthermore, we received credible reports from our members who were accredited election observers and our citizens-observers from the different polling units around the country which gave credence to our assertion of the shambolic elections.

“We want to express our deep disappointment in the Presidential and National Legislative election held by Independent Electoral Commission on the 25th February 2023, as we adjudge it to be not transparent, credible and fair, even to the process of the declaration of the winners, especially the president elect, where some sections of the electoral Act were obviously and consciously ignored.”

The losers may have kept mum but their eyes are now set on the court with the first issue centered around the controversial reconfiguration of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) as they have insisted on the preservation of data collected during the presidential and national assembly elections for use in the review and audit of the elections.

However, this met stiff resistance by INEC who approached the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal to reconsider the ex-parte order given to some political parties to inspect materials used for the election. The electoral body maintained that the reconfiguration would be needed to conduct the governorship and house of assembly elections.

Consequently, the court ordered INEC to upload the data on the BVAS machines to the back-end server and allow the applicants inspect and carry out digital forensic examination of all the electoral materials used in the conduct of the elections. It also directed the electoral body to make certified true copies of the results available to the respondents before reconfiguration of BVAS.

Pius Oiwoh, immediate past chairman, Benin branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), believes the courts are manned by men of honour and integrity and will not be influenced or intimidated by the Executive but will deliver fair judgments regardless of any statuses.

According to him, Nigerians are increasingly becoming mature. Beside, there was a peace pact that was signed by the presidential candidates. The global trend now is that whenever you have issues concerning the conduct of an election, the court is there to consider the petitions. The Electoral Act is very clear that when there are disputes, you should approach the election petition tribunal.

“We have moved from election to the court and Nigerians are optimistic; we still have faith in our judiciary and we hope that the judiciary, as an unbiased umpire, will determine the matter.

“What we have seen is a situation where everyone is waiting and expecting that the judiciary would discharge its constitutional mandate of sitting as an umpire to determine the dispute.

“We live in a democracy and believe in the rule of law. So, the courts are there to look at the issues and evidences. The courts are apolitical and does not care whose ox is gored. If the president-elect is the person who has been properly declared winner, then the court will affirm the decision of INEC. But if otherwise, the court will also take a decision,” he said.

Moses Onodua, a public affairs analyst, opined that this is an opportunity for the courts to do an excellent job by being fair and just to all the parties in the case.

“It is no longer news that the 2023 presidential election had been held and the results are also in the public domain. The outcome of the Presidential election has continued to generate controversies in several quarters. There have been strong opposition to the result that shows Bola Tinubu of the APC as the winner having met all the requirements of the law.

“However, Nigerians have largely remained quiet except some few persons who are still agitating and the defeated candidates who have gone to the tribunal to seek redress.

“Seriously speaking, some persons believe that the court will redeem their image by delivering fair judgment because recently, judgments that have been coming from the courts have been received with mixed feelings across the nation.

“The tribunal has been approached by PDP and the Labour Party, both of them are claiming victory. This case will be very easy for the judiciary to handle because both the PDP and LP have to prove beyond all reasonable doubts that they are the winners and not APC. This is going to be a hard nut for PDP and LP to crack. They can only make meaningful impact if they agree to work together and present one consolidated case before the tribunal.

“Let’s do everything humanly possible to preach peace and avoid any form of incitement of the masses and let us support the winner of the election whether through the Court or INEC. The success of the President is our success,” Onodua said.

Speaking on the quiet atmosphere, he said: “Generally, there is calm across the nation. People were expecting violent protest and riots because of the charged atmosphere before the election but fortunately, everywhere is calm. This calmness being experienced all over Nigeria is a product of many factors.

Some observers however, believed that the calmness may not mean acceptance by all Nigerians but that it may be for a moment as people are beholding the courts to do their part.

“It may be premature to say that people have moved on. I can tell you that people are hurt and nursing bottled-up rage against the system. What happens in the next few days, or weeks may determine where the country is headed,” Johnson Edet, a Systems expert, said.

Nigeria Decides 2023

Wike vows to rebuild PDP, chase out 'buccaneers'

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Those who think the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is finished may be shocked soon. The kingpin, who spearheaded the crash of the party at the February 25, 2023 presidential poll, Nyesom Wike of Rivers State, has vowed to lead in the rebuilding of the opposition party.

The governor hinted that irrespective of the antics of those who fragmented the party in a bid to achieve their inordinate ambition, he and other like minds would remain in politics to help rebuild the party to a formidable political party.

Wike made the pledge at the inauguration of the 10 km internal roads constructed by his administration in Igwuruta town of Ikwerre Local Government Area of the State on Thursday, March 9, 2023.

The Rivers State governor, who is the leader of the G-5 (governors) said after the general election, those who violated the provisions of the PDP constitution for rotation of elective and appointive offices will be shown the way out of the party.

"We have finished the first phase of the war, we are going to the second phase of the war. In the second phase of the war, we must chase out the buccaneers and vampires. We are going to chase them out of the party, take our party and rebuild our party.

"These people left our party in 2014/2015 and our party lost in the election. Again, they have come back, our party has lost again. They have destroyed our party. We are going to chase them out of our party. They have no role to play in our party."

Gov Wike, said it is hypocritical for the national leadership of the PDP which he said blatantly jettisoned provisions of Section 7 (3) C of the party's constitution that recommends rotation of elective and appointive offices, to accuse Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of not following its guidelines for the conduct of the 2023 general



L-R: former Secretary to Rivers State Government, Kenneth Kobani; PDP National Vice Chairman (South-South), Dan Orbih; Rivers State governor, Nyesom Wike; former Deputy Speaker House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Chibudum Nwuche and Rivers State Commissioners of Works, George-Kelly Dakorinima Alabo at the inauguration of 10KM internal roads in Igwuruta, Ikwerre LGA.

election.

"You are blaming INEC chairman, he did not follow guideline. You, did you follow our own constitution? He who seeks equity must come with clean hands. Whatever you sow you will reap."

He reiterated that by breaching Section 7 (3) C of the PDP constitution, the national leadership of the PDP committed anti-party that is responsible for the humiliating loss in the presidential election.

"I am an apostle of power shift. I fought for it. I have no apology to anybody. I said power must shift from the north to the south. I did not commit any anti-party. I fought for the unity of the country. Those of them at the national level in PDP committed anti-party.

"When people abandon the provisions of constitution of their party that talks about zoning of elective and appointive offices, what is more anti-party than that? You that

refuse to obey the constitution of your party because of impunity; because you think you have the number, so you refuse to obey the provisions of the constitution of your party."

Governor Wike maintained that the loss suffered by the PDP in the presidential election was avoidable if not for the obstinacy of those who erroneously believed that certain cabal in Aso Rock Villa will install them in the presidency.

The governor said Rivers State has once again reaffirmed its commitment to the PDP by winning all the three senatorial and nine out of ten House of Representative seats declared so far by INEC in the State.

Governor Wike, also took a swipe at his predecessor and immediate past Minister of Transportation, Chibuike Amaechi, whom he accused of stroking flaming embers of conflict between the people of Rivers State and their Igbo neighbours.

The governor said Amaechi's

attempt to reintroduce the long forgotten issue of abandoned property for his inordinate political agenda smacks of mischief.

He described as preposterous Amaechi's promise to the Igbos that they will be compensated for abandoned property in the State if they support his crony, Tonye Cole in the governorship election.

"We are living in peace, harmony with our (Igbo) brothers and sister. Because he wants to install Tonye Cole, whom two of them we are prosecuting for taking \$50million from our account, he is now talking about issue we have long forgotten. We are prosecuting them. They stole our money."

Gov Wike said if he Amaechi truly loved the Igbos, he would have supported the Labour Party presidential candidate, Peter Obi, but instead, he opted to mobilise support for the PDP presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, who is

from the north.

"Amaechi, you are half smart. You said you love the Igbos, but you supported Atiku for president. You refuse to support Obi. You didn't know the Igbos then, that you were supposed to support them."

He further added, "When he (Amaechi) was running for president, he said power should come to the south. When he lost, he didn't believe in that again, so power should go to the north so that when the north finish, he will beg them give him power. No way.

"Within us in our integrity group we agreed that we must make sure power comes to the South and in any State where you have control, if Labour comes first, APC must come second. If APC comes first, Labour party must come second, and we did it. I am proud to say it."

The governor also castigated the governorship candidate of the State Social Democratic Party, Senator Magnus Abe, for lying to the Christian Association of Nigeria that if they support his ambition he will sponsor Rivers people on pilgrimage to Israel.

He declared that currently in the country, no State government can claim it has supported Christendom more than his administration. To buttress this, the governor stated that the Rivers State government had singularly donated N800m and N500m respectively to the Anglican and Catholic churches university projects.

Providing the description of the project, Rivers State Commissioner for Works, George-Kelly Dakorinima Alabo said the 10 KM long road, with 20KM drain was awarded in August 2022 and completed within the agreed 6 months by the contractor, Monier Construction Company.

The chairman Monier Construction Company, Senator John Azuta Mbata, thanked the Rivers State government for awarding the contract to the company. He disclosed that the state government has paid the company in full for the project.

'Rivers not open to political...

Continued from page 23

on account of the huge developmental strides he recorded in his eight momentous years in office, and for ensuring peace and tranquility in Rivers State.

They said Wike turned Rivers from 'Rivers of Blood' into Nigeria's most admirable infrastructural hub, and a first choice destination for habitation, business and leisure before our very eyes.

The summit counselled elected and appointed office holders from Rivers State against being used as willing tools to unleash violence against the people, or undermine the genuine interest of the State at the national or sub-national levels of politicking.

The youth body restated the relevance and strategic location of Rivers State in the strategic geopolitical calculation of Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea, and stressed the need to accord the State its pride of place in

the scheme of things as the "Treasure Base of the Nation."

The participants were said to have considered the unsavoury political activities of a few stranger-elements in the state, especially those who allegedly hold the rigid and dogmatic view that Rivers people were still not mature enough to manage their own affairs, despite the creation of states way back on May 27, 1967, which answered their prayers to preside over their own affairs as a federating state within Nigeria.

Participants were said to have frowned at the increasing velocity of absurd political encirclement, brazen insults and targeted blackmail of Rivers people by a few political jobbers, who are said to yet recover from the loss of their defunct political empire in the days of yore.

The communique stated further: "The participants observed that Rivers people, especially the youth, are cognisant of the enormous sacrifices

made by their founding fathers to bring the state into existence, and thus saved the erstwhile Eastern minorities from programmed indigenous colonialism that ended 53 years ago by divine ordination and human agency.

"The participants seriously frowned at the renewed antics of a few delusional political "kingmakers", who brazenly boast that they have the installed capacity to determine who governs Rivers State. These ethnic bigots forget that there are so many paths to the top of the political mountain, and that these anachronistic cartoon characters lack the powers to decide which path is the best route to the top."

The report said the participants noted that these transactional elements who were very poor students of history forget that "power is nothing without control."

They are said to also forget that the greatest empires and kingdoms in recorded history were today lit-

tered with dilapidated monuments and landmarks of once proud warriors, tumbled castles and blunted swords that are laid waste in museums and ploughshares! "The eerie silence in the abode of erstwhile conquerors is a loud proclamation that skimmers and manipulators meet their nemesis as an inexorable law of history; no matter how long it may take.

"The participants noted that those who are dedicated to the type of toxic politics that is antithetical to good neighbourliness, decency and polish always usually live to regret their loquacious and brash engagement as contingent paths of history have proved over and over again.

The participants noted that those grandmasters of container politics see everything only in transactional terms, and so easily forget the Eleventh Commandment, to wit: "Thou shall not take the generosity of thy host for granted." It is very sad that

the noted open-door policy of Rivers people has been repeatedly been taken for granted for too long by provincial characters, who ironically have no history of accommodating visitors back in their own home states and medieval hamlets.

The youth observed that in the build-up to the 2023 general elections, as has been the case in previous exercises, these political waifs and jobbers resorted to offensive media circus shows without any iota of regard or respect for the sensibilities of their generous hosts. "The most annoying part is that these amateurish and ill-thought through media campaigns lack conviction of truth and elementary objectivity to boot."

Despite the scary tone of the communique, however, the participants observed that politics is a game of interest, networking, dialogue and bridge-building; rather than an opportunity to insult and blackmail one's way to power.

Election Aftermath

Wike reveals what happened in Jigawa that drove Peter Obi out of PDP

...Says what they planned for Obi in PDP happened to him at the convention ground

...Igbos not at war with Rivers people – Ohanaeze

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Governor Nyesom Wike of Rivers State has chosen to reveal what took place in Jigawa town in Jigawa State that actually drove Peter Obi from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the Labour Party.

Wike spoke to the Ohanaeze Nd'Igbo Worldwide he hosted on Thursday, March 9, 2023, in Government House, Port Harcourt.

The Igbos seem to have become the focus of campaigns from all the political parties in Rivers State since the Labour Party polled over 175,000 votes to chase the All Progressives Congress (APC) that was assisted by the governor to poll over 231,000 votes.

Wike took time to explain how Obi eventually decided to leave PDP for the Labour Party.

"Obi was running with us. I knew when Obi left. He was principled and he said he can't stand it, people should say the truth. He went to see Sule Lamido in Jigawa, not in Dutse, but in a village that will take you more than four or five hours drive from Dutse the capital.

"You know what he told Obi? He didn't tell him that look, you came late and I have chosen somebody. He said it is the north that will produce the next president. That was how Obi left, saying why is he wasting time. Ask him, that's how he left PDP."

He said that was what he saw at the convention ground, something that would have happened to Obi.

"Within minutes, knowing that I was going to win, your sons were all the ones who did everything, sabotaged me. I said Ok, no problem.

"But I still maintained that look, if you have taken the presidential candidate you can't take chairmanship again, give us back the chairman and I still stand by that and if you don't do that whatever you see you take."

South East politicians had held grudges on what Wike said about Obi in Awka, asking the former Anambra governor not to waste his time in the race but that he (Wike) should be given Anambra and SE votes in the PDP primary.

Wike however, told his guests that people like him were hated because they speak their mind always, but that that will not make him become apologetical to anybody.

He explained that before the election, the integrity group (G-5) met in Abuja and took a decision to support the position of governors



Rivers State governor, Nyesom Ezenwo Wike (r) exchanging pleasantries with the Deputy National Legal Adviser of Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo Worldwide, Peter Anele at the Government House, Port Harcourt on Thursday

of the All Progressives Congress (APC) who came out strong to say that power must shift to the south for the unity of Nigeria.

The governor also said he feels satisfied that southern Nigeria has produced the next president of the country resulting from the 25th February 2023 presidential election.

He stated that the outcome of the election is now an undeniable justification of the undeterred advocacy embarked upon by the G-5 governors of the PDP who he said worked so hard, contributing their quota to realise that feat.

The governor explained that as an advocate of southern presidency, it is not possible for him to have worked against the winning chances of any presidential candidate from the south.

Wike, therefore, described as untrue accusation raised against him in sections of the social media that he worked against Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, in the just concluded presidential election on the 25 February 2023.

"I supported that power must come to the south. When Obi came here, I gave him all the logistics; vehicles, other supports and paid for the stadium, but some other persons applied and I refused."

He said the agreement was to the extent that no votes in their various states should be ceded to any north-

ern candidate, which was what really happened.

The governor stressed that a careful look at the results of election in those states shows that southern presidential candidates emerged in first and second positions as evidence of the massive voting support they got.

"And we also agreed we must vote for the south, no vote for the northern candidate. Our contributions, nobody knows. If you check the pattern, we agreed, the south must come first and second in any

I supported that power must come to the south. When Obi came here, I gave him all the logistics; vehicles, other supports and paid for the stadium, but some other persons applied and I refused

state. And check it, all the voting patterns. If Labour Party wins here, APC will take second. If APC wins here, Labour Party will take second.

"That was our position. All my campaigns, nobody can say he heard me abuse Obi or Tinubu, I didn't do that. My campaign was against people of impunity who disobeyed the (PDP) constitution by saying there should not be zoning when there is a provision in our party's constitution that there must be zoning of elective and appointive offices."

Wike berated the former governor of Rivers State, Chibuike Amaechi, who he said went to the Igbos resident in the state to tell them that if they supported his candidate, Tonye Cole of the APC, they will get their compensation for abandoned property.

The governor said because of election, Amaechi was allegedly scratching on old scars and fanning the ember of violence to disrupt the prevailing cordial relationship and peace between Rivers people and the Igbos in the state.

Wike wondered why, if he loves the Igbos that much, he could not implement such compensation when he was governor of the state for eight years.

The governor also condemned the accusation raised by Amaechi that foreign scholarship his administration floated was discontinued because of the Igbos on the slot.

Governor Wike said if that was true, what about Rivers beneficiaries, what will he say about them?

The Rivers State governor insisted that the scholarship scheme was discontinued because of the exchange rate of the dollar and the quantum of none specialised courses like philosophy, English, Law and Arts students that were sponsored to study abroad.

Wike emphasised that while those students were withdrawn, his administration has sustained full scholarship to students studying medical and allied profession in Rivers State University and PAMO University of Medical Sciences.

In his speech, Deputy National Legal Adviser of Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo Worldwide, Peter Anele said Igbos have long sought to produce the president of Nigeria and they saw the last presidential election as an opportunity to clinch it.

He noted that Governor Wike has done the Igbos proud, remained a voice against social injustice, and marginalisation of Igbos, while creating conducive business climate for them and appointed one of them into his cabinet

On his part, the president of Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo in Rivers State, Lucky Ekeji, said Igbos are not at war with the Rivers State government and assured that as a group, they have urged all Igbos in the state to support the governorship bid of Siminalayi Fubara.

Entertainment



NMO Management holds music fashion runway to unite young pan-African creatives

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

THE NMO Management Limited has held its 8th edition of music and fashion runway to unite young pan-African creatives.

The event also featured the Game Changer Africa Acknowledgement Awards. The venue was Naval Dockyard, Lagos.

The annual occasion, which came under the theme, 'Fashion forward: a call to action for a green and sustainable continent', featured national and international designers and runway models.

It is a cultural showcase platform blending contemporary pan-African designers, international runway models, cutting edge fashion with live music.

Speaking at the programme which was also streamed live via social media platforms, director general, Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Chinyere Almona urged the Federal Government to focus on entertainment industry by creating an enabling environment for business creation and growth.

Almona also admonished the government to collaborate with the private sector to address the long-term effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the sector and leverage development financial institutions like Bank of Industry (BoI) to support the sector through innovative financing.

The director general also encouraged private sector players to keep their focus and creativity, adding that the greatest asset in the industry is the peculiar human instinct Nigerian youth possess.

While commending NMO Management Limited, organisers of the event for their vision towards making Nigeria a global leader in the entertainment sector, she added that the nation's cultural heritage in fashion, designs, arts, film and music presently has great impact on the industry.

Maintaining that the culture and creative industry has been driving innovation and creativity over the past decades.

She said: "Nigeria is a fast-growing hub for film production with a huge success story to tell about Nollywood, music, arts and fashion."

"Available data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that the arts, entertainment and recreation industry contribute about 0.2 to GDP, a significant improvement

from 0.04 in the 1990s.

"The sector's growth rate has been positive since the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Nigeria is a huge market for the creative industry with the population of about 209 million, growing customer base patronising the local industry, growing digital economy and e-commerce and rising number of people who want to build their career in the entertainment industry."

Speaking earlier, managing director, NMO Management Limited, Ngozi Omambala explained that the programme aimed to empower and unite young pan-African creatives.

Describing the occasion as the Nigeria's most influential fashion brand, Omambala said: "The annual event celebrates African rich cultural heritage and also features the Game Changer Africa Acknowledgement #GCAA, awards platform programme that honours trailblazers and pioneers, recognising their significant contributions in the creative industry."

She also expressed gladness to see the return of their physical event after two years of online predominance due to the pandemic.

Some of the designers who spoke in an interview lauded the organisers of the event and termed it as opportunity to show case their God-given talents.



Entertainment

Stakeholders advocate transformation of creative industry through sector bill

ANTHONY UDUGBA

THE Nigerian creative industry stakeholders have called for the transformation of the sector through the proposed Creative Industries Development Bill (CIDB). The group expressed the optimism that the bill had the potential to transform the Nigerian creative economy.

The call was made at the engagement session with Television, Film, Advertising, Arts, Gaming, and Animation sector in Lagos, Nigeria.

The collaborative effort between Nigeria's creative industries and the Presidency seeks to enhance the industry through a well designed action plan centered on putting the creatives "FIRST": funding, incentives, research, skills, and training.

The stakeholder engagement series led by the CIDB team kicked off on 4 March 2023, with an engagement session at the Omenka Gallery in Lagos, hosted by Oliver Enwonwu.

The event was attended by prominent stakeholders in the visual arts and arts sector, including leading gallery owners and curators such as the Executive and Artistic Director of the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos (CCA, Lagos) Oyindamola Layo Fakeye, and Segun Oni of

The Children's Art Gallery (TCA). Two key takeaways from that engagement were the concepts of Perpetual Royalties for artists on their work and the insertion that all new public buildings in Nigeria (Federal State and Local) should have iconic arts embedded in their budgets leading to a legacy of public monuments across Nigeria and the growth of the art market.

The following day, on Sunday, 5 March, the CIDB team met with leaders from the creative writing, performing arts, and theater sectors. These included Ifeanyi Avajah, chairman of the Lagos branch of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), Israel

Eboh, president of the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP), as well as cultural advocate Jahman Anikulapo, chair of the Committee for Relevant Art (CORA) and the filmmaker, Mahmoud Ali-Balogun. Anwuli Ojogwu, of the Society of Books and Magazines Editors of Nigeria (SBMEN), enjoined the CIDB team to consider that not all art, especially creative writing, worked on the for-profit model. She hoped that grants for creatives were one of the items being considered in the bill.

The team also met with media and culture entrepreneurs, that included conversations with the founder of the Silverbird Group, Ben Murray Bruce; the CEO of EbonyLife Media, Mo Abudu; the theatre producer, cultural entrepreneur and the CEO of Terra Kulture, Bolanle Austen-Peters; founder and the CEO of Africa International Film Festival (AFRIFF), Chioma Ude; the COO of Mavin Records, Tega Oghenejobo; Prolific comedians, Bovi, Nedu, and Chukwudi 'Husband Material' Ezugwu; creative industries leader and Comedian/Entrepreneur, Ali Baba and actor, Eyin-

na Nwigwe.

Laoye Jayieola, the CEO of the Nigeria Economic Summit Group (NESG) hosted the CIDB team led by the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Country Risk Assessment and Evaluation, Col. Felix Alaita (rtd), Chinenye Mba Uzoukwu, and Obi Asika, at the NESG headquarters, Summit House, on 7 March 2023. The meeting included the National Assembly Business Environment Roundtable (NASSBER) team and thematic leads from relevant NESG sectors. It was aimed at building support and momentum from the organized private sector. Dr Ikenna Nwosu, Facilitator, Tourism, Hospitality, Entertainment, Creatives and Sports Business (THECS) Policy Commission welcomed the idea of the CIDB and agreed that the NESG would collaborate with the team for the success of the project.

At the session hosted by Filmhouse Cinemas and TRACE, for players in the Television, Film, Advertising, Arts, Gaming, and Animation sectors, on 8 March, Col. Felix Alaita (rtd), explained that the CIDB as championed by the Presidency, is specifically aimed at transforming the Nigerian creative space through access to funding, provision of

incentives, enabling research, and the creation of an environment for skills development and training. Kelchi Nwosu of TBWA Concept spoke on the significance of the CIDB for the Advertising sector, while Anwulika Agina of Pan African University spoke on the need for -research institutes and schools to be inclusive. Also in attendance were Charles Novia, Tunde Laoye, Efe Omorogbe, Queen Ebegieson, Emeka Ossai, and Brenda Fashugba, amongst others.

Obi Asika, one of Nigeria's renowned creative industries' leaders and the CIDB Stakeholders Engagement Sub-Committee Lead, stated that the CIDB is a "whole of government and whole of nation" approach with key stakeholders continuously engaged. Chukuka Chukuma, Investment Banker and the CIDB Finance Sub-Committee Lead, emphasized the importance of leaving no one behind and the need to enable and support the sector. He explained that the bill is not intended to replace existing agencies but to act in the best interests of the creative industries, and drive collaboration. He noted that the private sector, development finance institutions, and global multilaterals all seek a clear line of sight into the sector, and the CIDB will meet their expectations and provide a one-stop-shop that facilitates seamless foreign direct investments.

Other members of the CIDB Presidential Advisory team—including Davidson Oturu, Ojoma Ochai, Tonye Faloughi-Ekezie, Baba Agba, Enyi Omeruah, Femi Odugbemi, Ijeoma Onah, Moses Babatope, Titilayo Adebola, Eghosa Imasuen, Oswald Osaretin Guobadia, and Chichi Nwoko—were present to give further insights into the details of the CIDB. Sam Onyemelukwe of TRACE espoused the vision of the CIDB as one whose time has come.

The CIDB team had a highly successful trip to Lagos. The engagement sessions were robust two-way conversations, and the consultation process is constant and ongoing.

The general consensus of attendees was gratitude for the efforts of the minister of information and culture in promoting the kind of

collaborative environment that led to the development of this laudable bill. Further engagements have been scheduled and planned for the six geopolitical zones. This approach provides an opportunity for Nigeria to be intentional about projecting Nigerian soft power and Nigerian Storytellers.

The continuing stakeholder engagement sessions aim to provide an opportunity for industry professionals to engage with the CIDB team, understand the significance and benefits of the bill, and provide valuable insights to make it fit-for-purpose and shape the future of the creative industries in Nigeria.



Women's world

IWD: Early empowerment panacea to women's economic emancipation -Olori Atuwatse III

AS the World marked the International Women's Day Wednesday, the Olori Atuwatse III of Warri Kingdom, has stressed the imperativeness of early empowerment for women, noting that such hold the key towards achieving and sustaining economic empowerment for women.

The Warri Queen at the International Women's Day interactive dinner and networking hosted by Dotmount Communication therefore, advocated for an institutional framework that would fast-track policies aimed at expanding the social economic potentials of women in Nigeria and World over.

Olori, who was recently appointed by President Muhammadu Buhari to serve as a member of the High Level Advisory Committee, (HLAC) on Women Economic Empowerment and Gender in Nigeria, spoke at the interactive dinner and networking held at the Wells Carlton Hotels & Apartments in Abuja to mark the IWD.

The women and child advocate also decried low women representation in political positions for women in Nigeria and appealed to the incoming administration to take a cue from other climes with fair share for women representation on political positions.

She disclosed that addressing some of the challenges against women's development, the Olu of Warri and herself established the Royal Iwera Foundation with the aim of upscaling and advancing positively women and child empowerment in Warri Kingdom.

"Often, when we talk about economic and social empowerment, we concentrate on women who are already in the labour force. While this is good, early empowerment is better. I am an advocate in the power of ear-

“For decades, access to education has changed women's lives globally, empowering many to realize their career potential, and saving many from oppressive socio-economic situations”



L-R: Standing: Pleasure Magazine Founder, Adedotun Olaoluwa; Managing Director Highland Disco Acquisition Ltd, Ahmed Modibbo; Seated: CEO, Rock Realty Limited, Ibukun Adedayo; Former first lady of Benue State, Yemisi Suswam; Her Royal Highness, Olori Atuwatse III; with Managing Director Urban Shelter, Hajia. Saadiya Aminu, during the International Women's Day lecture 'Embrace Equality' organised by Dotmount Communication in Abuja.

ly empowerment, we must start from girlhood. We must start with education, sensitisation, and breaking the barriers that hold young girls back from knowing their potential early on.

"For decades, access to education has changed women's lives globally, empowering many to realize their career potential, and saving many from oppressive socio-economic situations.

"The more we invest in girl-child education, the likelier it is that all Nigerian girls will grow into economically empowered women. Besides achieving early empowerment by creating access to Montessori and STEM education for children, RIF is sustaining empowerment through its skills institute.

"Currently, in Nigeria, women makeup less than 10% of our political representatives. This means we are not reflected nearly enough in the process that makes political and economic decisions that shape our lives," she said.

According to her, "Some governments across the world have instituted policies and laws to improve representation, and I hope with the forthcoming administration, Nigeria will follow suit and have stricter laws that do the same. Greater female representation in government will go a long way in creating an enabling and sustaining environment for women's social and economic empowerment."

The 2023 International Women's Day, has its theme: 'Digit all: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality.'

Also speaking at the event, Ahmed Dahiru Modibbo, who has over 30 years of professional expe-

rience as a corporate lawyer, administrator and governance practitioner confessed that his experiences caused him to see what women need to do to scale up their abilities to have them in the right places with the right skills, talents and opportunities to make a change for our continent.

Modibbo further emphasized that, "Networking is fundamental to ensuring visibility in the industry because there only so much women's competence and expertise can achieve. Nominations to Boards are usually facilitated by networks and participation in informal forums like clubs, social events and so on. Women are typically absent when conversations about Board appointments are discussed."

On her part, Aisha Salisu said that in the quest for a gender-balanced society, women need to remove self-limitations and rise above those placed by society, you can be anything you choose to be, set your goals and chart a course to achieving them."

This she said can be achieved by promoting equity while supporting women in STEM fields since doing so benefits all individuals, groups, and nations.

In the keynote speech presented by the CEO of Urban Shelter, Hajia Saadiya Aminu, on Equal Rights to Economic Resources and Property Ownership, noted that women "need to move at the skill and speed that is required to play to win and this can be achieved by improving access to education, capital, legal rights, patriarch systems, regulation and enforcement of land rights and property ownership.

“Nominations to Boards are usually facilitated by networks and participation in informal forums like clubs, social events and so on. Women are typically absent when conversations about Board appointments are discusse”

"For decades, access to education has changed women's lives globally, empowering many to realise their career potential, and saving many from oppressive socio-economic situations.

The discussion came to an end with an insightful speech from the Special Guest, Dr Yemisi Suswam, who encouraged the women present to grow their network and master the art of collaboration to achieve multiplied results.

Speaking on the topic, 'Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality,' she said: "Evaluating the gains in the world today, I think there's a notable achievement but looking inward Africa, we are generally moving up but in Nigeria specifically, we aren't there yet in the area of gender equality. And as the theme of this year suggests, I am trusting that every woman, every girl in the digital world will be able to seize this as a wake-up call to deploy all the digital machineries to promote equality.

"I therefore, call on the youth of our nation not to rest on their oars because they are equally marginalised and if the women are in, they are rest assured that they are also in. We need each other We need the youth We need the media- just like the organisers, publishers of pleasure magazine All hands must be on deck

"Every woman presents at the event made individual promises on the 'Commitment Wall' to lift other women up and bring them to the table, by impactfully leveraging their sphere of influence. Progress made with the promises written on the Commitment Wall will be monitored and evaluated throughout the course of the year."

Dotmount Communications is a leading global provider of earned media software and services to public relations and marketing communications professionals. Dotmount Communications's software allows users to identify key influencers, craft and distribute strategic content, and measure meaningful impact. Dotmount Communications has over 200 employees with offices in 15 countries.

Arts

Taiye Idahor: Female artist on the rise

OBINNA EMELIKE

If you are a keen follower of the Nigerian visual art circle and the artists, you will spot Taiye Idahor with ease. The Fine Art graduate from Yaba College of Technology Lagos is gifted, amid enthralling works that speak volume about her creative ingenuity. Though she specialized in Sculpture at the college, today she runs a multimedia practice amid experiment with new concepts.

One intrigue about the artist is her sheer ability to use collage, drawing, sculpture and mixed media to contemplate ideas through the lens of memory, culture and modernity. Also, using drawn and collaged photographic elements, she skillfully reflects on the historical and contemporary status of women within an increasingly globalized society, starting from Nigeria, her country of birth.

If you saw her first solo exhibition titled 'Hairvolution' in 2014 at the Whitespace Gallery in Lagos, and her current shows, you will marvel at her fast she is honing and mastering her skill, as well as, the gradual attainment to a high level craftsmanship in the art space.

In 2018, staged her first exhibition in the United Kingdom, a successful outing that spoke volume of her creative ingenuity and mastering of her craft. Titled 'Okhuo', which translates



to "woman" in Bini, the exhibition showcased the cultural splendor of Bini coral beads at Tyburn Gallery in London where she generously displayed her signature works.

While in Hairvolution, she focused on the identity of women using "hair" as a visual language in her work, in Okhuo she used figurative renderings of Benin iconography, the most prominent of which are coral beads to honor powerful women, es-

pecially in the ancient Benin Empire and contemporary Benin woman.

The Okhuo series further spotlighted her techniques; photo paper collages with pen drawings in coloured pencil, which depict dressed coral beads worn as worn by individuals against clear white and black paper, as though suspended in a clear cloud. There was no human face on it, hence offering a composition, which gave her work an ethe-

real beauty. She admitted leaving out the images in order to speak of the presence that should exist within the beads, but that was absent.

Art critic, who follows her works, once said that Idahor's works embody absence through the voids and the empty spaces that are apparent in her collages but they only express her constant questioning of the issues she is exploring while leaving room for the audience to also contemplate them.

She also lends support to the women's cause. She uses female faces including her own to confront issues surrounding women in Nigeria, their daily struggle with culture and tradition in the modern world.

Recalling her days of little beginning and the lessons learnt then and encouragement that still propels her. "I remember when I was working with Olu Amoda during my one year internship in 2003 or was it 2004?... Anyway Mr Olu would always say that every piece of metal he had left over from the gates or windows and art he made were very important", she says.

Aside from her solo outings, she has participated in many joint exhibitions and projects such as the Presidential Inauguration Exhibition Abuja Nigeria 2011, Dubai Art Fair, Marker 2013, Standing Out, an all-female artists exhibition at Temple Muse in 2016, among others. Also, Idahor's intricate collage and pencil drawings, which reflect Bini royalty and ancient African feminism, were among the work on display at the maiden edition of Art X Lagos.

Some of her works are in major museums across the world including being part of the collections of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town, South Africa; the Davis Museum, Wellesley, Massachusetts; and the Brooklyn Museum, New York.

She lives and works in Lagos.

Forher hosts first-ever leadership summit for secondary school girls in Akwa Ibom

...SMEfunds awards N300,000 cash prizes to essay winners

Forher, a non-governmental organisation dedicated to empowering young girls with education and skills in Nigeria, successfully hosted its maiden leadership summit on March 3, 2023 in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The conference, themed "Girls and Possibilities", provided a platform for secondary school-aged girls to gain access to valuable insights and knowledge from accomplished speakers in various fields, designed to enable them to fully discover and maximize their potential.

At the conference hall of Ibom E-Library, in Uyo, Remarkable Mary Akpan, founder of forher, welcomed the students, speakers and guests to the event with a heartfelt speech.

Addressing the students, Remarkable stated: "I just want to let every one of you here know you are the reason we are having this event. In one of my conversations with my team, I mentioned to them that one of the things I need us to do is to have an annual leadership event where we get experts and professionals to talk to young girls, and I wanted my attendees to be secondary school girls from the age of thirteen. The reason is because I believe that this is a very sensitive age in a girl's life, as a lot begins to happen to them emotionally, biologically, and mentally."

According to Mary, life became more purposeful for her at the age of 13.

"I remember vividly that I was thirteen when I said to myself that I wanted to be useful and intentional.

It was the age I decided to be careful about the friends I kept, the books I read and the places I went to. It was the age I decided to not just be useful to myself alone, but to my family and society at large. I hope every one of you leaves here inspired."

According to the founder, the theme of the event was painstakingly chosen to communicate the overall purpose of the summit.

"We were so careful to make sure that we got the right theme for this event "Girls and Possibilities". There is nothing you cannot do. Whatever you set your mind to do, you can do it. If you believe in God, take him along on the journey, and everything will be alright."

Speakers

True to Mary's words, the event was lined up with speakers who overcame numerous obstacles to distinguish themselves in their respective disciplines.

Sonye Allannah, a certified etiquette & image consultant, taught the girls etiquettes that bordered on daily living, dressing and self-confidence.

Allannah said elegance was not about being noticed but about being remembered.

Despite having poor grades in French at secondary school, Allannah went on to be fluent in French and German, became a career diplomat and is currently a public speaker and life coach.

"It is fine to evaluate yourself from time to time but don't demean your worth no matter how poor your actions were. Pat yourself at the back

for every small feat you attend," she advised.

She concluded her session by pointing out that "the application of good etiquette builds the block for a bright future."

Mmanti Umoh, executive director, Community Stakeholders for Social Good, and founding curator at Teens Network, pointed out the challenges associated with being a girl and highlighted the need for mentorship.

"In many parts of the world, girls face discrimination, harassment, and violence simply because of their gender. They are often told that they cannot do certain things or that they are not good enough", Umoh said.

"But I am here today to tell you that this is not true. Girls are capable of achieving great things. They can be leaders, scientists, doctors, engineers, and anything they set their minds to. However, it is not always easy for girls to reach their full potential, especially when they lack role models or mentors to guide them.

"This is why mentorship is so important for girls. Mentorship is a relationship between a more experienced person (the mentor) and a less experienced person (the mentee) that is based on mutual trust, respect, and learning. Through mentorship, girls can gain valuable knowledge, skills, and guidance from someone who has walked the same path before them."

Another speaker at the event was Hamzat Lawal, an award-winning Nigerian activist and campaigner, who has led campaigns in Climate Change, Open Data, advocacy cam-

paigns and development policies as it affects rural and deprived grassroots communities. Using a succession of personal stories, Lawal taught the girls the principles of decision-making, education, networking, integrity, self-determination and confidence. He encouraged them to defeat self-limitation and achieve the goals they have set for themselves.

Dr. Linus Okorie, a leadership development coach and founder/president of Guardians of the Nation International (GOTNI), was a prominent speaker at the conference. Dr. Okorie utilized the KASH acronym (Knowledge, Attitude, Skills, Habit) to emphasize his presentation on "Becoming a Leader of Excellence." His talk focused on key leadership attributes, including transparency, visibility, growth, self-reflection, and the cultivation of an entrepreneurial attitude. Dr. Okorie highlighted the importance of these characteristics in the development of young individuals into well-rounded adults, capable of achieving their goals and leading the next generation of revolutionaries.

The leadership summit also had in attendance, Rt Hon. Oniofiok Luke, a young and dynamic public servant, currently serving as the member representing Etinan, Nsit Ibom/Nsit Ubium Federal Constituency in the Federal House of Representatives, and a former speaker of the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly. Hon. Luke delivered an inspiring speech on how girls can hold policy makers accountable. He emphasized the importance of utilizing technology

in creating systems to monitor and track the activities of federal and state governments, with a view to making policymakers accountable to the people. He urged the audience to cultivate self-confidence, rather than rely on external validation, as a crucial element for personal growth and development.

Essay competition

Following the lecture sessions hosted by the speakers at the conference, an essay competition was held where representatives from six secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State spoke on the topic, "Digital Generation, Our Generation", in line with this year's International Women's Day Celebration theme "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality."

Nigerian Christian Institute (N.C.I.) emerged winners with Government Secondary Grammar School, Ikot Akpabio and Government Technical College, Abak coming in 2nd and 3rd with a hundred and fifty thousand naira (N150,000) cash prize for the winners, as well as a hundred thousand naira (N100,000) and fifty thousand naira (N50,000) consolation prizes for the 2nd and 3rd-placed winners respectively.

The summit had in attendance students from Dekis High School, Itu, Etinan Institute, Etinan, Joy Prime Schools, Uyo, Mary Hanney Secondary School, Oron, Mboho Unity School, Uruan, Government Model Girls Secondary School, Abak, and girls sponsored by Trade Union Congress and Land of Hope.

The Worshipper

Too much money in politics has created serious problem for Nigeria - Prelate Makinde

Sunday Ola Makinde, the former Prelate of Methodist Church Nigeria, in this interview spoke on the recent happenings in the country, and the need to promote the peace among Nigerians. Excerpts by SEYI JOHN SALAU:

What is your reaction to the outcome of the presidential elections?

There is no election that has been 100 percent perfect; look at Kenya, Republic of Congo, even in US and UK they will still have one inadequacy or the other. Even with the electronic system there can be error. Sometimes, when you operate your laptop or phones you find errors. The planes too do have mechanical errors. I think we should not try to solve one problem and cause a greater one. I have witnessed civil war in this country and don't pray for second one. United we stand divided we fall. I prefer a united country with fairness, equality, and unity. What caused all this outcry is because people are fed up with one section of the country dominating another, which is not fair. I want politicians not to allow what happened during Abiola time to happen again. We should learn from history. Let's accept whatever we get and allow Nigeria to move because of our children. I am old, but for the sake of our children and the unity of Nigeria. But there can be no unity in Nigeria if there is no fairness. Four years or eight years will still come and go and Nigeria will remain forever. We should put Nigeria first above individual and political party's interests. Let's accept the outcome in good faith and let Nigeria move forward, so that we will not have repetition of civil war.

Do you think the country is divided along tribal lines?

They have divided Nigeria across tribal and religious lines. That is why we should revisit conferences that we have done especially under Jonathan. Let's come together and discuss and remove religious diversity among us, because those two things play a major role. Let's de-emphasise money in politics. Let's pay sitting allowances to the politicians. The salary is too fat, remuneration is too fat. All the allowances are too much. Let's give them only sitting allowance and not many people will go to Abuja again. Let all the money go to infrastructure or agriculture. Our judges are suffering, our schools are suffering. No good roads. And we are spending too much to



Prelate Makinde

maintain the politicians. I hate hearing professional politicians they are professional thieves. If the money is small nobody will be fighting who wants to be president, senator, house of assembly member and others.

We now have a president-elect; however the Islamisation agenda is back on the lips of many. How true is that agenda?

Do you know the number of people they have killed? You know what Boko Haram is saying: education is forbidden. You can't get C of O for church in any part of the north. We the religious leaders have been talking. One thing I know is that by the grace of God we are serving, their plans will not work. The eastern part and the south-south and south west, they did it in the past; the Boko Haram stopped at Ogbomoso they were able to capture Ilorin. But let's accommodate the problem we have now,

this has happened let's accept it and see how it will run.

That takes us back to the Muslim-Muslim ticket. What is your take now?

The Muslim-Muslim is gradually turning to an ethnic, tribalism which is very bad. They are turning it from religious to tribal issue. I warn Nigerians as an elderly person, let's forget our differences and look at what joins us together. Nobody should use religion to disorganise Nigeria. I cannot dispute the Islamisation agender in Nigeria but it will be so difficult in the west and so difficult in the east and in the south-south because it will be match for match. When people talk of jihad, they should know that there are crusades too. As you have jihadist, you have crusaders. When they bring their jihad we bring our crusades it will be match for match. They wanted to destroy Israel, but the more they tried to destroy them

the more they prevail. In Christendom we have crusades but we believe in the love of God instead of destruction. I am not afraid, even Tinubu knows that Christians and Muslims leave together in peace.

There is this fear that the president-elect and the VP being of the same faith will deepen the Islamisation agenda?

I am a liberal man; if after six months we see the trace then we know what to do. When God said no to Abiola Muslim-Muslim ticket there was nothing anyone could do about it, and if God said no to this one, there is nothing anyone could do to it too. But if God says yes to it, there will be no jihad and no division. Let the will of God prevail. This man has never been a jihadist, he has ruled Lagos. We don't want anybody to be marginalised.

Some Christian bodies have come out to endorse their candidates, what is your take on that?

We have given political education to our members; it was in the past when they said politics is a dirty game. Christians are in Nigeria and must be involved in politics. Even if it is dirty go and practise it. The only thing we don't endorse is tribal, ethnic or religious basis. We go by God's guardian. We love Nigeria and we don't want Nigeria to divide.

CAN in Lagos for instance has thrown its weight behind Sanwo-Olu;

When people talk of jihad, they should know that there are crusades too. As you have jihadist, you have crusaders. When they bring their jihad we bring our crusades it will be match for match

how do you see that?

If you put your will above the will of God the divine will will overrule your own will.

Is it out of place or right?

It is out of place if one religion is being marginalised, but if not so, it will not be out of place. You cannot generalise, for the fact that CAN leader said this does not mean all Christian leaders in Lagos said that; but what they are saying is that what is good for the goose is good for the gander. We have so many complexities in Nigeria that we have to split before we can apportion blame. But, it is not a very good thing to support blindly. You have to do it with the fear of God.

Is it right for Christian leaders to openly declare for a candidate?

Let's be moderate in all we do, that is what can give us peace.

What is your take on the redesigning of the Naira that has brought a lot of economic hardships on Nigerians?

It was done at a wrong time. I am an elderly Nigerian, during the civil war we didn't suffer much like this. The governor of central bank should have been removed. Anybody that must be the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria must be apolitical.

But the president gave the approval?

The president shouldn't have given the approval without the consent of the parliament. We are suffering, we have money in the bank we can't access it. I met some aged people in the bank, I was almost weeping, no kobo for them. And we said we have leaders. As I am speaking I don't worth up to N10, 000 physical cash in my house, it is not good. We are not at war. What are the judiciary and the legislatures doing? This is doing the right thing at a wrong time. During the civil war, we didn't experience what we are experiencing now. People are suffering, they are talking about cashless policy are we educated as that? This teaches us that when we want to choose who will be our president, governor or legislature; he or she must be highly educated, not semi-educated people.

Abia Anglican Bishop admonishes knights to embrace good reputation

...Archbishop raises alarm over threats to demolish Church in Abia

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Geoffrey Obijuru Ibeabuchi, the bishop of Umuahia Diocese of Anglican Communion, has charged the council of knights in the diocese to always remember that a good reputation is more than silver and gold.

Ibeabuchi, who gave the charge during three-day 2023 Rededication of the Council of Knights held at St. Michael's Anglican Church, Nkwoegwu, Ohuhu in Umuahia North Local

government Area of Abia State, admonished Knights, Dames and Ladies to make Ecclesiastes chapter 7 verse 1 their watchword this year and be rest assured that they would be successful in their walk with God.

In a release by Uzomba Ekwuribe, the image maker of the council said the Guest Preacher Joel Kelechi who spoke on the topic 'A Good Reputation is More Valuable', recalled that a good name or character would always be better appreciated than other worldly attributes and achievements.

The resource person, who is also a

lecturer at Trinity College, Umuahia, charged members of Council in the Diocese to avoid pitfalls of the Biblical Solomon and shun vain gloriousness, adding that vanity upon vanity would always be vanity.

He further charged the knights to turn to God, be born again and be true soldiers of Christ, and that 2023 would be a most fruitful year for the Diocese.

In another development, Isaac Nwaobia, the Archbishop of Aba Ecclesiastical Province, Anglican has sounded a note of warning to some elements threatening to demolish St

Stephen's Cathedral, Umuahia and her Parsonage to desist from such planned action or face the wrath of God and full weight of the law.

He pointed out that the Church has no connection, business or relationship with any individual or group of persons with regard to Church properties, as further threat or suspicious movement in or around the Church premises would attract negative actions from Aba Ecclesiastical Province.

The Archbishop of Aba gave the warning at the end of the Provincial Council meeting of Communion held

at St Stephen's Cathedral, Umuahia during which the participants deliberated on diverse issues affecting the Province as well as political and economic affairs of the nation.

Nwaobia decried the serious crises plaguing Nigeria such as insecurity, corruption, terrorism, fuel scarcity, cashless policy of the redesigned Naira which he noted were affecting Nigerians negatively.

He urged Christians to remain faithful, consistent, and steadfast in serving God despite the challenges they might be facing.

SundayBusiness

Food &
Beverages
With
Ayo Oyoze Baje



As Spectra Foods and Beverages make the difference

the quality and quantity of the items produced under a safe production environment.

Beyond the Vision, it has exhibited commitment to its Mission Statement which clearly states that: "We will satisfy the market needs for quality and affordable food products that offer beneficial opportunities as related to the consumers' well being and health, while also reducing the risk of diseases, in a way that adds value to all our stakeholders."

From the nutritional perspective the rush for Spectra cocoa powder drink is based on the knowledge of its immense health benefits.

For instance, cocoa contains plant-based flavonoids especially catechin, epicatechin and procyanidin. This powerful trifecta works to relax the blood vessels.

Essentially, the polyphenols, anti-oxidants help to improve on the cholesterol and blood sugar levels, thereby helping to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Also Cocoa powder is rich in theobromine that reduces inflammation and protects the body from diseases such as high blood pressure, cancer and diabetes.

Its focus and assurance on processing and packaging foods

that are healthy underscores the certification of all its products by both NAFDAC and the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON).

Amongst these products are snacks, flour, beverages and other favorite functional foods.

In specific terms there are Betamark tomato paste, mango slices that go for N500 each. The defatted soy flour, soghurt drink, Suco chocolate drink and Hyfiba sorghum soy instant meal as well as the Spectra cocoa pouch are there for the asking.

So also is the Sobake defatted soy flour that you are advised to thicken your soup with.

Furthermore, the all-purpose flour of Spectra Foods, made from hard wheat has the nutritional values of containing protein, carbohydrates, fat and fibre.

With calories of 364kcal, 10 grams of protein, 76 grams of carbohydrates and 1 gram of fat it is good for the health of the consumers, specifically in this manner.

The 20.5% of protein builds up the body cells. The 1-3% of fat keeps the body warm. The carbohydrates present as starch gives you the needed energy.

While the 3grams of fibre per cup lowers the cholesterol, as well as the

blood sugar levels the Vitamin A promotes clear vision, smooth skin and hair health even as it boosts the body's immune system.

On its part the Vitamin B2 (Riboflavin) boosts the immune system as well as body growth. Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine) converts food to energy as the Vitamin B12 cobalamin improves the production of red blood cells. The niacin present in the all-purpose flour is good for cellular metabolism as it also lowers the blood cholesterol level. Now you understand the increasing demand for Spectra Foods and Beverages.

And because of the confidence the food company has in its products it participated at the COWLSO Women Conference exhibition to showcase some of its products including Spectra cocoa powder, the chocolate drink, the yogurt, chewie snacks.

Through that it promoted the nutritional benefits of the cocoa powder as being 100% natural, boosting brain power, lowers blood pressure, managing diabetes, the healing of wounds, and reducing fatigue.

Similarly, it projected the Fast O' Meal as anti-virus, anti-cancer, protection of the nerves, anti-inflammatory and anti-aging.

The Soghurt made of soy and milk was shown to be anti-diabetic, reduces cholesterol level, prevents liver damage and heart disease because it's rich in Vitamin, potassium and iron.

As for sales and marketing the capable teams are on ground to take orders and ensure prompt delivery.

In a similar vein, consumers of Spectra foods made from sorghum stand to benefit from the rich content of poly phenols which are effective against some forms of inflammation while its anti-oxidants prevent cancer.

From all the foregoing, it is patently clear that in spite of the harsh economic challenges bedeviling the investors some are succeeding against all the odds. And Spectra Foods and Beverages happens to be one of such.

It is not surprising therefore, that it has gone ahead to clinch the prestigious award as the Best Agro Food Processing, Manufacturing and Marketing company in Nigeria.

With 30 years on it deserves a big kudos for keeping the food industry flag flying higher!

By Ayo Oyoze Baje is Nigeria's first food technologist to practice as a journalist. ayobaje@yahoo.co.uk; 07068638066

When Spectra Industries celebrated its 30th anniversary in the global market in 2022, the buzz and attention it attracted was based on the fulfillment of its mandate right from the outset.

With the promise to be the market leader in processing of functional foods, it has indeed become the home of quality foods, giving value for all the customers' money spent.

That is with specific regards to

Why Terra Jollof cube becoming consumers' pick

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Since its entry into the market, Terra Jollof Cubes has been commended by consumers for its game-changing move to complement the preparation of Jollof rice in Nigeria. Before now, chefs, caterers and homemakers have had to make do with a host of spices, complicated recipes and cooking methods in an attempt to achieve the desired tastes they craved for in Jollof rice.

Along with its promise of an extraordinary jollof experience, Terra Jollof Cubes is packed with unique mix of traditional ingredients like pepper, thyme, turmeric and garlic among others in a single cube to deliver that bottom pot Jollof taste that stands out in a competitive marketplace.

A cross-section of chefs, caterers and homemakers who offered their perspectives confirmed that Terra Jollof Cubes has not only further simplified the process of preparing Jollof rice with its exciting combination of traditional spices in a cube, but has greatly improved their jollof rice aroma and taste.

There are no stereotypical ways of making jollof rice but you cannot miss the unique and irresistible bottom-pot taste and aroma that comes out when you add cubes of Terra Jollof

Cubes.

Mrs. Eunice Udoma, a housewife and mother of 3 who lives in Agege stated that while there are several ways of preparing Jollof rice, however, everyone agrees on its end point – a great extraordinary taste and flavour.

"I have always sought to achieve that extraordinary bottom pot taste

of jollof rice I eat at some parties at home. I always get close to achieving it but never spot on. My friend at work introduced Terra Jollof Cubes to me and since my first try, I have never missed having a pack of Terra Jollof Cubes in my kitchen cabinet.

"Addition of Terra Jollof Cube to my pot of Jollof rice has added a

remarkable taste to my jollof, leaving my family with smiling faces of satisfaction and with no single grain left on the plate" she stated

Deepanjan Roy, Group Executive Director - TGI says that the company is delighted with the positive feedback and is confident that Terra Jollof Cubes is achieving its objective of elevating the taste and aroma of Jollof rice across homes, restaurants and in celebratory occasions.

"We saw a vacuum in the area of giving our consumers a seasoning cube that is tailor-made for their jollof rice cooking, and we went ahead to fill it," he said.

Probal Bhattacharya, Chief Marketing Officer, TGI Group stressed that Terra Jollof Cubes symbolizes the understanding of what consumers value in their tasty, bottom-pot, flavourful jollof rice.

"We developed Terra Jollof Cubes after years of in-depth research, studying and understanding the consumers' palate and taste preferences in various regions as well as their ways and patterns of cooking Jollof rice. We unearthed rich insights from these studies that guided us in developing the very special recipe for Terra Jollof Cube that is now being so widely appreciated by consumers.

"As the word of its unique impact in making Jollof so special spreads, we know more and more consumers

would include Terra Jollof Cubes in their pot of Jollof rice to achieve that extraordinary Jollof experience," he said.

Terra Seasoning Cubes are made up of wholesome, carefully sourced essential ingredients specially designed to meet the discerning Nigerian consumers' needs in every meal, offering great taste, flavour and aroma for that unique cuisine experience. Every meal cooked with Terra guarantees an enjoyable meal and a rich signature homemade taste experience. Available in Beef, Chicken, Shrimp and Jollof flavours, in various consumer-friendly pack sizes, nationwide.

Tropical General Investments (TGI) Group is an international investment and holding company with diversified interests and investments across Africa, The Middle East, Asia and other emerging markets. TGI's investments focus on driving inclusivity and value addition using locally sourced raw materials, state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities and a highly skilled workforce to produce world class products that are consumed both locally and exported to global markets. Across markets, TGI Group owns over a hundred leading brands in Fast Moving Consumer Goods, Agricultural Inputs, Industrial Chemicals, Homecare Products and Pharmaceuticals.



Perspective



BANJI OJEWALE

Jose Mourinho is the unpredictable, irritable yet unforgettable Portuguese soccer coach renowned for a host of feats confounding forecasters. He took clubs to great heights in his in-form days. Few tenderers of his era have matched his history: he has won a domestic title record in four different countries; he is one of only three managers to have lifted the UEFA Champions League twice with two different clubs; he is the first manager to clinch a European hat-trick, after winning the inaugural 2022 Europa Conference League with Roma, having previously secured the Champions League and the Europa version.

What's the magic, if there's any, that earns you prized international accolades in such a gritty sport? Once, in the newsroom of a popular TV station in Lagos, I listened as an analyst previewing a Mourinho match, attempted an answer; he sought a "demystification" of the ways of the 60-year-old who calls himself the "Special One." He said all you needed to second-guess the Portuguese in a game was to look closely at his starting selection; it would lead you straight into his secret.

On this occasion, Mourinho's Chelsea was facing a heavy-scoring side in the English Premiership League. The coach fielded Nigeria's Mikel Obi and two or three others in irregular positions to begin the game. Upon noticing this tactical formation, our analyst concluded that "Chelsea would play a defensive game to deny little access at goal for even the deadliest strikers

Frank Mba in Ogun: A take from

in the world."

He predicted finally: "With this Mourinho approach, the favoured visitors won't get any chance at goal; nor would Chelsea attempt deep forays beyond their defensive wall into the opponents' 18."

I think the forecast came to pass: although not a drab show in the long run, the match ended goalless.

I have lately been reminded of these winning ways of a famous football figure following the appointment of Frank Emeka Mba as the commissioner of Police, CP, of Ogun State in Nigeria's southwest. As in the field of soccer, where a discerning coach aligns his team in recognition of the perceived or experiential threat of the opposite side, the Police authorities have brought into the Ogun scene not only an officer to prevent crime, but also to fight it if and when it erupts. So, as soon as Mba was named as the new CP in the Gateway State, observers came to the conclusion that, given his background of a string of successful exploits where he has operated, he's here to upset the old order and still the storm of criminality in Ogun.

Clearly, the Police undertook an avid reading of the security portfolio in the state and the outcome is that a figure would be needed now to change the game from a normal run to an asymmetrical style. The authorities would appear to have taken the Mourinho course in giving the citizens Mba to police the state. A Mourinho wouldn't battle you with the conventional rules in the books. He'd be guided largely by a determination to contain you as you throw in your best. One moment of a Mourinho-contrived tactical slip by the ambushed, mortally harassed, pressed and stressed enemy during the skirmishes would be the invitation for the killer move.

That's been Mba's style. Newsmen who covered

his days as Assistant Commissioner of Police at State Criminal Investigation Department, Panti, Lagos State, say he established a policing standard whose hallmark was countering violent extremism while identifying with his community. Crime beat journalists have also spoken of Mba's habitation in Ajah, a mixed-multitude haven of the hoi polloi and patricians. There as Area Commander, Mba reportedly took the battle to the doorsteps of the criminals; in some instances he neutralized them before their operation. Where they went ahead of him, Mba nonetheless didn't give up. He put up a chase, leading to significant arrests and subsequently, a fall in crime stats in the area under his watch. These are the primary functions of scientific policing: preventing crime and defeating it if it shows its vile and venomous visage.

But in Ogun, a state speeding to overthrow the crime leaders, Mba the troubleshooter would need to go outside the box and rifle through his own ideas bag for innovative strategies. I believe the Police Command saw in him a man who could read a festering situation and respond in real-time to tame it. Ogun borders a bursting Lagos which is emptying its flotsam and jetsam into Ota, the state's economic hub. It is just a neat example of where the best of policing should take place. It has a long stretch of road that opens Nigeria to the whole of the West Coast of Africa and, indeed the world. It boasts an assembly of manufacturing plants second only to Lagos in all of the southwest. It is home to more universities than most of the country's urban centres. These vibrant features combine with other economic, cultural and social facets of the state to make it an alluring investment destination.

Yet if insecurity is allowed a free ride in Ogun, this massive potential would remain latent and void growth and development not only in the state, but also in Nigeria, because within the

state are revenue-bringing holdings benefiting the country.

The CP will realize that Ogun is troubled by an army of kidnapers, armed robbers, rival cultic groups etc. who have terrorized the community and put progress on hold, despite the laudable efforts of government and security bodies. Mba must complement what has been done with other initiatives he successfully applied elsewhere.

Mba would also be expected to work with the government to free Ogun from the vicious grip of land grabbers (omoonile) whose activities have retarded the development of Ota. There's a law barring them from their exploitative business. But it seems this piece of utilitarian legislation has gone into a retreat.

The new CP, as an experienced public relations person (three times he was appointed Police PRO, one of which saw him as Force PRO in Abuja), would need to work closely with the community and the media in the state. These platforms are veritable structures required in building trust between the Police and the people. Lack of mutual trust is responsible for lack of vital information-sharing in our society. The Police under Mba can thaw the icy situation by letting his men and officers establish more friendly presence in the society, notably in the inner communities. The Police must be our friend, in deed, not on the ubiquitous posters in the Police station.

When the analyst at the opening of this article saw the selection of the football coach at the commencement of a game, he correctly predicted the tempo of the match. Can we also here in Ogun hope that Frank Mba's coming as the CP would reenact his fame as a redoubtable crimefighter?

Ojewale is a journalist and writer in Ota, Ogun State.

Can we begin to believe again?

CYRUS ADEMOLA

We all know we've let down our guard these past few days, or weeks. The tension and circus of political intrigues have made us forget who we really are. We've become like the proverbial man who looked faintly into the mirror only to go his way and forget what was looking right back at him some moment ago. Some of us have cursed God under our breath; we've let despair set in, with hope dashed and bereft. In short, we've stopped believing.

If these past weeks have taught us anything, it's that there are really no answers where we seek them. Our prophets and pastors suddenly became soothsayers, foretelling things that are beyond their ecclesiastical purviews. Some even claimed they've seen the night visions and have been granted the crystal ball to look into the future and tell the mind of God concerning the election. As expected, their prophecies fell short. God hadn't revealed to them anything; they only spoke according to the spur of their emotional state.

But the damage they've done to the faith of those who look up to them as spiritual figures and God's representatives on earth isn't inconsequential. These people have begun to question their faith in God, asking and probing about His existence because the election didn't go in their favour. This is the problem with mixing religion with politics. Like water poured into a bowl of oil, one soon finds out that both entities are never bedfellows. But as Christians, what we see is that we've allowed

charlatans and con men take over our pulpits, working up unstable emotions and feeding them with false hope. These doomsday prophets do more damage to the Christian faith than a well-thought-through atheistic verbiage.

As a clergy myself, saddled with the responsibility to nurture the faith of others and protect the flocks of God from salvaging wolves and tigers, I've seen these consequences played out in real-time. I've watched those who I wouldn't believe would question their faith used remarks and phrases unbecoming of a Christian simply because the election didn't go a certain way. I then begin to wonder whether the faith of my people is really rooted in the mystic and wondrous constellation of two millennials, or the ebbs and flows of a political panoply in a country in Africa. Who knew that the greatest argument against faith in Christ isn't the writings of Bertrand Russell, Christopher Hitchens or Richard Dawkins, but the in-working of an electoral process in Nigeria?

The Christian faith didn't endure this long simply because we Christians prayed and got everything we've wanted up until this point. Stories of martyrdom carried out by wicked politicians and monarchs of yore were seen to strengthen the faith of the early Christians, not to leave them in a dark valley of doubts and questions about God's existence. If you believe in God only when you see your prayer answered, I promise you this: you won't be believing for long. A faith anchored only on the possibility of a smooth sailing will end up shipwrecked alongside the boat.

Bad things happen to good people. We don't

always get our way in life simply because we are believers. God never promised Christians that all their leaders will be a David, a man after His heart. He never hinted that His sovereignty will be only made visible when our preferred politicians emerged as winners of election. Talks around doubting God because of an election is at best childish reasoning, and at worst plainly foolish. A true Christian knows that God is still on the throne. His faith isn't tied on the outcome of the game of power, but on the eternal truth that stretches beyond here into the deep blue sky of the world to come.

Needles to say, the damage has been done to our collective experience of faith due to those who played the politics of religion, or should I say the religion of politics. Christians need to start rebuilding their trust back in God amid the crucible of political imperfections. If politics only defines your worldview about God, you need a new lens to see God with. You need to turn to the theology of men like C.S. Lewis, William Crag and John C. Lennox. More importantly, you need to find God again in His holy, written Word. The Word of God says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17).

We can believe again in the God who has brought us this far. Politics is a human mechanism that only mimics the higher power of the world to come. It's a human game played by the transient and faulty rules of human system. Indeed, God is sovereign and He can interfere in our political process whenever He sees fit. But just as we can't always expect Henry Ford to meddle with the internal combustion of an automobile to avert

a fatal car accident, we shouldn't expect God to always cheat nature to make things go our way. God transcends the natural process of human system. He's not in any way enslaved by it.

It's fitting and Christlike to have a word of prayer said for our nation in trying times and perform our civic duty when called upon to cast our votes. Still, we can even decide to run for a political office to spread more light in a dark and sullen place salvaged with corruption, mismanagement and gross incompetence. But having done all that, what's expected of us is to live peacefully, trusting in God to lead us on in our journey of faith on earth. Christ never promised a piece of meat in every pot. What He showed us is how to live meaningfully in such a way that will prepare us for not only the here, but also the hereafter.

Faith in God should transcend the natural processes of things. As a Christian, you should believe that God knows the best no matter what the outcome is. You should rely on His infinite wisdom that everything will turn out the way He plans at the end of the day. Trusting God sometimes means His ways are beyond our comprehension. But humility requires that we give Him the benefit of doubt that He knows exactly what He is doing. Let's not despair. Let's not cast away our faith because things don't go the way we want them to. Elections have come and gone; let's not throw out our Christian heritage because of our conceived loss. Now, that it's all over, can we begin to believe again?

.Ademola writes via cyrusademola@gmail.com.

Perspective



COLLINS OKEKE

Introduction

It is estimated that about 92 million of the over 200 million people, that make up the entire population of Nigeria have no access to electricity. Where access to electricity is available, a full day of uninterrupted supply is not guaranteed. Despite the abundance of natural energy sources, Nigeria faces significant electricity supply challenges stifling industrial growth, limiting commercial ventures' expansion and profitability, and the well-being of people. Presently, the primary energy sources are gas and hydroelectricity. Although the country is diversifying to renewables, progress is extremely slow. This article makes the case for investments in Nigeria's renewable energy.

Why renewable energy?

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA) 'Renewable 2020' report, Renewable energy capacity is set to expand by 50% between 2019 and 2024, led by solar energy. Solar, wind, and hydropower projects are rolling out at their fastest rate in four years, making the argument that the future lies in using renewable energy. Energy security concerns caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine have motivated countries to increasingly turn to renewables such as solar and wind to reduce reliance on imported fossil

The case for investments in Nigeria's renewable energy

fuels, whose prices have spiked dramatically. Global renewable power capacity is now expected to grow by 2,400 gigawatts (GW) over the 2022-2027 period, an amount equal to the entire power capacity of China today, according to Renewables 2022. This massive expected increase is 30% higher than the growth forecast just a year ago, highlighting how quickly governments have thrown additional policy weight behind renewables. The report finds that renewables are set to account for over 90% of global electricity expansion over the next five years, overtaking coal to become the largest source of global electricity by early 2025. Nigeria's location in the tropics offers an abundance of sunshine all year round with over 2,600 hours of sunlight per year (about 7 hours of sunlight daily, on average). Experts believe Nigeria has the economic war chest and environmental conditions to tap into renewable energy sources, especially solar. Estimates by the World Bank suggest that investing in solar-powered plants could increase the availability of electricity to almost 80 million people who currently have none. This means transitioning to solar-based energy could help diversify Nigeria's energy portfolio and reduce high electricity bills.

Legal, regulatory, and policy incentives:

Nigeria is not oblivious to the global trend and many opportunities and so is progressively evolving policy and regulatory frameworks to incentivize renewable energy such as the National Electric Power Policy 2001, Renewable Electricity Policy Guidelines 2006, and Electricity Power Sector Reform (EPSRA) Act 2005. The EPSRA is the principal law that governs the

Nigerian power sector. It also establishes the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), the principal regulator of the power sector in Nigeria. The NERC in performing its functions has established several policies and regulations like the NERC Mini-Grid Regulation 2016, NERC Renewable Energy Feed-In Tariff Regulations 2015, and recently the Independent Electricity Distribution Network (IEDN) licence. Aside from laws and policies, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has put incentives such as the VAT (Modification Order) 2020. This exempts specified renewable energy equipment from the application of VAT with respect to the importation or in-country sale of the equipment. The FGN also launched the Solar Power Naija Project. The project focuses on providing five million households with solar home systems for off-grid communities, under the Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan (NESP). The implementation of the project is facilitated by the Central Bank of Nigeria, which will make available NGN140bn (approximately US\$340m) in direct and indirect loans to qualifying projects. Multilateral agencies and institutional investors have made impact investments on players in the sector. For example, the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) are currently partnering with the Rural Electrification Agency (REA) with respect to the Nigeria Electrification Programme with a US\$350m commitment from the World Bank, and about US\$148m from the AfDB. According to the REA, the programme has so far provided electricity to five million consumers. The International Finance Corporation has launched a sustainable energy financing and advisory programme,

the Climate Change Investment Programme for Africa, which will provide funds and advisory services to banks to help them increase financing for private sector energy efficiency, renewable energy, and cleaner production projects. Similarly, the EU has committed about US\$47m in funding for renewable energy projects in emerging markets, including Nigeria. These efforts appear to be yielding fruit, as many significant renewable energy projects are coming on-stream. In addition to the large number of mini-grids and small scale solar Independent Power Projects (IPPs) springing up across the country, the FGN is also taking steps to boost the existing hydroelectric generation capacity, with the concession of Gurara Hydropower Project, the proposed concession of the Zungeru Hydropower Project and the planned development of the 3,050 MW Mambilla Hydropower Project.

Conclusion

Renewable energy will continue to rise in the upcoming decade, edging out fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Governments worldwide, including Nigeria, are making laws, policies, and regulations to diversify to renewables. Energy companies must work to take advantage of existing incentives and opportunities such as marketing opportunities, reduction of emissions, lower energy costs, and many others.

Okeke is an Associate Partner/Head of Public Sector Practice Group at Olisa Agbakoba Legal (OAL)



NZAN OGBE

Can Levene Energy be considered the modern agent of sustainable energy?

consumption in Nigeria had revolved around 'dirty' fuels as it often mutated from firewood-coal-kerosene and biomass (sawdust) depending on the state of the economy and citizens' purchasing power per time.

This decade, more Nigerians have transitioned from using kerosene and charcoal to Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), or cooking gas, as its consumption hit a record 1 million metric tonnes in 2020. Derived from fossil fuels, cooking gas is widely considered as a cleaner alternative and a transition fuel that could help to deepen energy access in the long run. But cooking gas affordability remains a big challenge to many Nigerians, especially now that the country is dealing with a cost-of-living crisis.

For instance, while coal and firewood used for domestic cooking has been declining in most parts of urban Nigeria, the same cannot be said for people living in rural communities who cannot afford cooking gas. As per the National Bureau of Statistics data, energy poverty still pervades as 68.3% of Nigerian households use solid biomass (firewood and charcoal) for cooking.

In several international fora, the Nigerian government often makes commitments to achieve Sustainable Energy for all (SE4All) by 2030, a plan which took after the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG7) - 'Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all'. Not just that, Nigeria also aims to cut carbon emissions and reach net zero by 2060, emphasising the crucial role that gas will play in the country's clean energy roadmap going forward. The plans look good on paper. How about walking the talk?

While transitioning to cleaner energy sources will help Africa's largest oil producer achieve the emission reduction plans it committed to in its nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, the set milestones can only be

achieved by attracting the right private capital to the energy sector and by ensuring that the policies and actions of the government are adequately followed through in line with the best global practices.

Gone are the days when investment could be made in just about any energy source. It's not as simple as that any more as the global factors at play are enormous. This underscores why Nigeria, at this juncture, needs energy companies with the capacity and cutting-edge innovations to serve as modern vehicles to drive the country's sustainable energy plans.

In view of this, we at Levene Energy are proud to say that we are a company that understands the global dynamics and urgency around energy sustainability, provision and access. As a Nigerian-based (and globally focused) company, Levene Energy, in its operations and deliverables, has continued to implement legacy initiatives focused on energy transition, notwithstanding the effects of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict on the global energy market, hampering energy sustainability in countries.

Beyond answering the question of how much energy can be produced, established energy companies and start-up investments must be keen on the method of production and consumption and how sustainable energy is wheeled out to the end-users. Levene has not deviated from this, relying on the latest technology and its network of highly skilled professionals.

The current project being undertaken by Levene Energy: the construction of Building Integrated Photo-Voltaic (BIPV), is said to be the largest in Africa. BIPVs are products and systems that generate solar power and can be easily integrated into different building parts, including roofs and windows. The project, when completed, will further open up the solar energy space in Nigeria and set the country on the cusp of reaching a new renewable milestone.

As hinted in a recently launched Renewable

Energy Roadmap (Remap) by the Nigerian government and the International Renewable Energy Agency, in Nigeria, nearly 60% of the nation's energy demand by 2050 is projected to be met through renewable energy sources.

The global renewable power capacity is expected to grow by 2400 gigawatts (GW) in just five years; between 2022 and 2027. This is as much as the renewable power added in the last 20 years, according to a recent forecast by the International Energy Agency (IEA). The forecast further indicated that solar and wind sources would be the biggest driver of renewables.

If investments in renewables are aggressive enough, bookmakers are projecting it could drive down costs and give more people access to energy in remote areas, something Levene Energy already has in the pipeline. Following its strategic partnership with NNPC Gas Marketing Limited (NGML) to build and operate gas pipelines, Levene Energy is primed to take advantage of the gas commercialisation policy of the Nigerian government, rapidly evolving as a modern agent of sustainable energy on the African continent.

To harness the abundance of potential that was hitherto untapped in the energy sector as well as achieve Nigeria's goal of universal access to energy by 2030, government and operators in the energy sector would have to synergise and lead practical initiatives targeted at making more energy companies with the right mix of technologies and private capital key into the nation's energy sustainability plans.

This will fast-track Nigeria's pursuit of the United Nations' net-zero emissions plans by 2060 and bolster energy security in a nation of over 200 million people.

Ogbe is the group chief executive officer, Levene Energy Holdings.

Perspective



BUNMI MAKINWA

Twenty reasons for Lagos

facilities and buildings is remarkable, despite limited spaces for open and outdoor activities in certain areas.

3. Bus stops and parking spaces for commercial transportation are better in designs and usefulness, and often have seating places.

4. Pedestrian bridges are situated for ease of use, including being wheel-chair accessible in some places. Many more of safe bridges are needed and getting them used by more people is an important next step.

Services

5. Traffic services by the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) largely keep traffic flowing, despite the overwhelming crush at certain locations. The nightmarish traffic blockages that occur when LASTMA staff are not on the roads are testimony to the effectiveness of LASTMA's efforts. Remember that traffic police used to attempt to provide the same services and the difference is clear.

6. Waste removal and cleanliness is organized and payment systems are in place. The roads are generally clean to high standards.

7. There is a seamless payment of land use charges online, and official, polite acknowledgment of payments made. During former Governor Akinwunmi Ambode's term, the land use assessment rose astronomically and many people refused to pay the new assessment. The issue was resolved by Governor Sanwo-Olu's government and a new, reduced assessment was done. A negotiated lump-sum payment was accepted at a further reduced amount. I found it a very modern and progressive way to negotiate a settlement that benefitted both the government and the people.

8. All payments that I make to the state are done in banks or through electronic banking services. This has eliminated the time wasted traveling to government offices, waiting in long queues and attendant under-the-table transactions with go-betweens. It should reduce the stealing of government money. There would have been a significant increase in the internally-generated revenue through this policy.

Abuses and Social Work

9. A policy or law to eliminate Omo Onile (so-called descendants of land owners) has made it doubly difficult for the "area boys" to harass or intimidate people who purchase land or embark on building. I see that the traditional area boys are less frequent and are less assertive.

10. Women abuse, child abuse, and infringement of rights of vulnerable people is no longer taken for granted as there are offices and designated institutions to handle the cases in a timely manner when they are brought forward. There is an active and well-organized civil society that beams its antennae on the issues. School authorities are less likely to shirk their responsibilities or allow abuses of their students because of a more aware society, backed with governmental teeth.

11. I testify to quick responses to lapses or failures in adhering to official stipulations such as when buildings collapse. The quicker responses by governmental agencies to fire incidents and emergencies show a higher level of assumption of responsibility for citizens' welfare.

Accessibility

12. It has been possible for aggrieved

persons and regular citizens to seek audience with government officials. From very senior officials such as commissioners to local government councilors, there is a readiness to listen and act on matters that are brought for attention. In many cases, it has also been possible to hold the officials to account.

13. The governance system from grassroots to the top has been put to test in our own community residents' association. There are regular interactions with local and state government officials. Sometimes the request for meetings, knowledge and information sharing emanates from the government.

14. One of the critical steps for Lagos State residents to have access to government as a community is the registration of a Community Development Association. Our own group of residents submitted our documents, as stipulated, and received the certificate of recognition without making any inducement to any officials or agents.

Health Care

15. One major indicator of development is the level of health care that people have. From testimonies by family members, friends and others, the health and medical care that is provided by government clinics and hospitals in Lagos State is of very high standard. On many occasions, I advised people to seek health services at government hospitals and they have had positive experiences. The costs are relatively low too, although the waiting time may be long.

16. The standards of health and medical care providers in Lagos State are high. From direct interactions with several medical and healthcare professionals who work for the state, there is no doubt that the government has done commendably well to retain them despite the serious outflow of such professionals away from Nigeria.

17. On a busy weekday in August 2022, I saw a man who suddenly fell down as he walked along Oba Akran road in Lagos. I approached him with other bystanders. As we were having a quick exchange on what to do, a siren came from the distance. Right before my very eyes, an ambulance stopped, two emergency care providers attended to the fallen man, wheeled him on a special stretcher into the ambulance and quickly ferried him away for more attention. The scene staggered me. What a delightful surprise to see emergency care operated on a Lagos street as if it was in a developed economy.

I have since the incident paid more than ordinary attention to official ambulances that are parked in some parts of Lagos. I look with renewed respect at siren-blasting ambulances that try to wiggle through the dense traffic in Lagos and urge drivers to give them passage. Until the personal experience that I had, I used to see ambulances as another Lagos vehicular nuisance and opportunists who use special lights and sirens to harass other road users.

Security

18. In the diplomatic community in Nigeria, Lagos is one of the few places where diplomats and staff of international organizations such as the United Nations are allowed to go. Due to the security challenges of Nigeria in general, the country is not a popular destination for international meetings and conferences. However, Lagos and Abuja are easily ap-

proved for travel, although with restrictions. Many other states are absolutely no-go areas for diplomats. When, or are done briefly under severe restrictions and security support.

19. Very often, the government and police in Lagos issue security information to guide communities and the messages come through Community Development Associations.

COVID Study

20. In July 2021, Princeton University in the USA and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) approached some state governments and the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (PTF) in Nigeria to take part in a multi-country review of government activities on the epidemic. Lagos State COVID response was acknowledged as a gold standard. A wonderful insight to information and materials developed thanks to the special efforts of former National Coordinator of PTF, Dr. Sani Aliyu, and Lagos State Commissioner for Health, Professor Akin Abayomi. They organized with their colleagues in government and its agencies, leaders in the organized private sector and civil society to have high-level exchange with the Princeton study group. Of all the states contacted in Nigeria, Lagos State was the most organized, forthcoming and professionally engaging.

In my opinion, the momentum of the development of Lagos State points in the right direction under Governor Sanwo-Olu's government.

This notwithstanding, the state is blighted with many problems; some are unique to the characters of Lagos and others come from the general array of problems that affect Nigeria. Among others: How well are the resources of the state spent to improve the state? How can the sixth-largest economy in Africa operate effectively without a regular electricity supply? Rather than continue to increase taxes for small and large businesses, would the state do better to increase opportunities for wealth creation and spread its taxation among many more enterprises?

Why does the state allow thugs to act as a "guerilla army" on roads and public places where they forcibly collect monies from hapless citizens? Why would hoodlums be given free rein to use violence at major events and social functions to extort money? To what extent are the state contractors vetted to ensure optimum performance? Why is allegiance to the party allowed to override due diligence and obtaining results for some contracts? The Lagos name brand is not reputable internationally – what will be done to rebrand it and successfully improve its image?

Conclusion

Overall, the current development trend of Lagos State should continue. In a new phase for the future, regular performance analysis and evaluation is needed and changes must be made to overcome the drawbacks. At this time, I shall not take chances with the future of this important state, and I will not embark on a novel adventure which direction is unclear.

Bunmi Makinwa is the former Africa Regional Director of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and CEO of AUNIQUEI Communication for Leadership

The conversation with my friend distracted me from paying attention to the streets as he drove away from Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos. It struck me that he was not taking the usual roads. More surprising was that he seemed headed for the Oshodi area and would probably continue through Mushin. He continued and we passed through Oshodi and the usually crowded areas. No refuse heaps. No traders cluttering the streets. Traffic flow was smooth all the way through Mushin too.

"What happened?" I exclaimed.

"This is the reason that I drove you through this roundabout way to go to Ikeja. I want you to see the new and changing Lagos," my friend explained.

The incident above was in 2008 or 2009 during a visit to Nigeria. I saw a Lagos that I had thought was almost impossible. During two weeks in Nigeria and visits to four states, Lagos stood out in its cleanliness, orderliness and general improvement. Governor Babatunde Fasola was in office at the time and his government was changing the city of some 14 million people at the time.

At the time, some other friends said that the changes were going on throughout Lagos State. I started from then on to pay more attention to Lagos State, where I had largely grown up and worked as a young person. By the time Fasola left office in 2015, his performance in Lagos was widely recognized as the rebirth of Lagos city and Lagos State, a continuation of a certain master plan of transformation.

Fast forward to many years later, succeeding Lagos State governments have created a state that is widely known to be ahead, despite the numerous problems that have hobbled the country as a whole.

As a public commentator and analyst on governance with the benefit of having lived in more than ten cities in various countries, it is timely and appropriate that I put on record my personal experience as a witness to the recent impressive development of Lagos State. In my opinion, there are many areas where the state has done well and continues to improve the well-being of ordinary inhabitants, under Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu.

The list below is not in any order of importance. It reflects my personal experiences and observations of situations, incidents and activities that come to mind as I watch the trajectory of growth of Lagos State and Lagos, the most populated city in Africa which is about four times the size of Johannesburg or Addis Ababa, and about three times the size of New York city.

Infrastructures

1. There is a striking improvement of roads in many communities, including pedestrian walkways and good evacuation of flood water, although more work needs to be done to reduce flooding.

2. The improvement of educational

Perspective



LUSEGUN RUNSEWE

Nigeria is a great nation, immensely endowed with vast human and material resources. With a vast verdant expanse and a population of over 200 million people, the possibilities of Nigeria's greatness are almost limitless. The rest of Africa looks up to Nigeria to provide the necessary leadership required to galvanize the continent to the actualisation of its vision of growth and development. Many African leaders, past and present, have openly stated that when Nigeria sneezes, the rest of Africa catches cold. This underscores the level of regard Africa has for Nigeria as a big brother and the giant of Africa.

Indeed, Nigeria has continued to display the disposition required of its position as the leader of Africa. We spearheaded the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, South Africa amongst others. We played a leading role in the establishment of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) as well as the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU). We played a key role in the formation of ECOMOG in the

2023 Presidential election and the unity of Nigeria

effort to restore peace, law and order in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Nigeria has severally sacrificed man and materials to ensure continental peace, social harmony stability, growth and development in Africa.

In the light of the foregoing, it is highly worrisome that the just concluded 2023 presidential election of February 25 has ensued undue political tension in our land. It is unfortunate that elections in Nigeria have tended to become platforms for appealing to primordial sentiments of ethnicity and religion. We have turned our political space into a theatre of war riddled with hate speech, mud-slinging, character assassination and all forms of verbal assault.

All these unhealthy and unprofitable political practices played out so prominently in the build up to the 2023 presidential election that the Father Matthew Kuka and General Salami's peace building committee had to hurriedly convene a second Presidential Peace Accord, a few days to the election.

It is to the glory of God that the heated political landscape did not degenerate into violent crises. The presidential election has been held and the results have been announced. The right thing to do now is for us to come together as patriotic Nigerians and as stakeholders in the Nigeria project, to earnestly commence the process of rebuilding our nation.

We should remember that election is like a game. In the political game of election, there has to be a winner and a loser. The beauty

of any political game, like every other game, is for the losers to accept defeat in the spirit of sportsmanship and for the winner to be magnanimous in victory.

Accordingly, I urge those who emerged victorious to immediately reach out to those who lost in the spirit of mutual respect and statesmanship. We should henceforth desist from all forms of provocative statements that tend to mock or undermine the sensibility of those that lost in the election. It is clear that all presidential aspirants came off with genuine enthusiastic intention and burning desire to serve the nation. Although the approaches as indicated in the political manifestos of the various parties may have been different, the underlying motivation is service to the nation, in the greatest interest of Nigeria.

Let me at this point commend the National Peace Committee spearheaded by General Abdulsalami Abubakar and Father Mathew Kuka for navigating the campaign razzmatazz out of the murky waters.

The committee members have demonstrated once again, their abiding commitment to the unity, peace and development of our dear nation. May I therefore humbly urge the committee not to rest on its oars until we successfully transit into the next regime. They should continue to appeal for peace and douse the political tension generated by the election.

It is pertinent to point out that we have no other country outside Nigeria. This is why our leaders and stakeholders must continue

to lead in the campaign to ensure sustainable peace, national unity and harmonious co-existence. The circumstances of the moment call for the intervention of our political leaders and past heads of state who are still alive; our religious leaders through their various organizations like the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Jama'atu Nasril Islam and our Traditional Institutions and others to help the nation keep the peace. These personalities and associations have enormous influence on their vast followers and are in the best position to chart a course for sustainable peace in Nigeria.

It will be out of order to say that those who feel genuinely aggrieved and short-changed in the electoral process not to do what is required by law. The point is that there are laid down processes and procedures for seeking redress when we feel we have been denied our right. This is the right and reasonable path to follow.

Finally, I wish to conclude by emphasizing, as former President Goodluck Jonathan once said, that the electoral victory of anybody does not worth the blood of another Nigerian. Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand. We must continue to be united as brothers so that the labour of our heroes past shall not be in vain.

Runsewe is the director general, National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC)

Politics

Electoral violence, ballot box snatching: Rivers Govt House police troops fingered

...Stakeholders say unless votes are allowed to stand, violence will continue

...Eyewitnesses say INEC is out to create havoc through election fraud

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Stakeholders at a post-election review session by civil society organisations found most eye-witnesses pointing fingers at the police troops from the Rivers State Government House.

The session was organized by Community Initiative for Enhanced Peace and Development (CIEPD) headed by Egondu Esinwoke Ogbalor, the executive director.

One of the virulent accusers, a university professor, Lawrence Chuku from Woji in Port Harcourt the Rivers State Government House Police troops were the ones that carted away ballot boxes especially in Obio/Akpor local council area where he and the governor come from.

Chuku said the people must all join hands to salvage the country if we wanted it to be good. "The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the architect of the electoral fraud that we saw. The situation now is likened to a man in his house and someone comes to rape his mother or daughter. He will choose to die first before you do it."

The university don said until people's votes are allowed stand, violence will surely continue. "Until people come out to resist them, they will continue. This is the worst election I have seen in my life."

The political activist who said he and many other opposition politicians were under threat of arrest the governorship election called on voters to protect their votes.

Another eye-witness, Godspower Igwe, State Coordinator (YACORE), said it's true the not-too-long young to run made youths to participate in politics. He said there was massive turnout of voters.



Egondu Ogbalor, executive director of CIEPD

The snag, he said, is that a serving senator came and stopped counting of votes with police attached to him. "I was angry and even tore the \$200 they gave to the youth corpsers (NYSC members) working with the INEC."

He said, police, please help this nation.

Some others who gave eye-witness accounts called INEC as the number one culprit in whatever is happening in the Niger Delta in the elections. He said they refused to upload results to the Bimodal voter accreditation system (BVAS), and gave wrong codes and could no longer be reached.

An journalist and NGO official, Constance Meju, narrated her account thus: "In our unit, there was no electoral officer to start off the voting. Voting started by 2.30pm. INEC suppressed voting."

"After counting, no password to upload. This incensed the voters. A Hilux van came and took the INEC people. This caused uproar and provoked crisis."

The CIEPD board member, Joshua Gogo PhD, opened the session saying the NGO has



Stakeholders at the election review session

the critical stakeholders assembled in the hall. He mentioned the police, the civil defence, and Civil society organisations.

Speaking for the Civil Defence, the deputy commandant, Ike Charles, said: "We are determined to make it better. It's actually God that we rely on."

He feared that pipelines are usually targeted during elections because the oil thieves know that most security attention is at elections.

The representative of the police, an assistant commissioner, Mamman Joseph, said Rivers State was okay compared with other states. "We implore these community representatives here to go back and educate their people to obey the electoral rules. There will be massive deployment of forces to protect sensitive facilities and installations."

A member of the Transition Monitoring Group, Rivers State, said they were there to support the CIEPD transition monitoring effort. "We monitored areas and partnered with CIEPD

in last election."

An officer in dispute & conflict resolution desk said they want people to know that there is life after election. "Let's achieve peace with all energy. This why this engagement is important."

The head of civil society organisations, Enefaa Georgewill, joined to appeal that there is life after elections, and that everybody cannot be politicians. He said his group saved and protected women at Elekahia by activating all the contacts with the military.

Speaking for the Partnership Initiative in the Niger Delta (PIND), Meju said the NGO is a non-profit organization promoting peace in the Niger Delta and that peace comes from collaboration.

The Programme Manager of CIEPD, Adeniyi Lawal, said the NGO has trained almost 200 conflict trackers in Rivers State, and that other NGOs are working in other key states.

"Ours is to support conflict resolution in the Niger Delta. We formed trackers in the region to report in a platform since 2015 till now, making three circles. We track elections

"PIND approached us on collaboration in a violence prevention project. They have the funding, we provided coverage to sensitise the stakeholders, CSOs, media who we call the peace actors. This project is in eight local council areas."

The executive director of CIEPD, Ogbalor, said there would be debriefing session later in the year. "This time, it has to include the politicians so we get to hear their own side of the story and their own experience."

"There is to be a peace accord but only one politician is here. He will not have to sign now but we will get this done. We will follow them up to sign and to see what they do."

Health and Living

Why improving maternal health, first 1000 days of life matters

ANTHONIA OBOKOH

Ensuring that every child stands the chance to survive, develop and thrive is an imperative that requires continuous action. The first 1000 days are a passport to a healthy and brighter future for every child if promoted behaviours are strictly and intentionally adhered to.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with the government and partners are joining forces to address all the aspects that hinder mothers and babies from receiving adequate care and nutrition during the critical 1000 days period by educating families and providing support to mothers for exclusive breastfeeding, expanding immunisation coverage and uptake.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, MICS 6 report launched in 2022 but conducted in 2021 by the National Bureau of Statistics, (NBS), in collaboration with UNICEF, and other development agencies further shows that both stunting and wasting are low in the South-West region and generally Nigeria, still low to other countries.

In Southwest, the MICS 6 report, shows that all states in the South-West region of Nigeria demonstrate poor outcomes in the prevalence of stunting and wasting.

In Nigeria, 12 million children under 5 are stunted, meaning they are too short for their age due to malnutrition. Of those, about half become stunted during pregnancy and the first six months of life, 500-day when a child is fully dependent on maternal nutrition, according to a new analysis in a Global Nutrition Crisis reports on Adolescent girls and women.

While wasting refers to a child who is too thin for his or her height and is the result of recent rapid weight loss or failure to gain weight.

According to the data on stunting Oyo state ranks highest with 34.5 percent, and Ogun state has 26.6 percent of its children still stunted. Followed by Osun with 23.7 percent, Ekiti state with 22.3 percent, Ondo state has 20.4 percent and Lagos state having the least stunted



children at 17.2 percent.

For wasting, Ekiti and Ondo States have 3.3 percent respectively and that is the lowest in South-West states. Oyo has 3.9 percent, Osun 4.5 percent and Ogun has 5.7 percent, Lagos state with 6.4 percent with the highest prevalence among children under 5 years of age.

Meanwhile, SDG target 2.2 seeks to end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age and addressing the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

The First 1000 Days are from the conception of the child to the second birthday. During this period, nutritional needs must be constantly increasing. However, not meeting the child's nutritional needs could negatively influence their long and short-term health outcomes.

Tackling malnutrition starts with investing in the first 1000 days, according to Bill Gates, this issue affects everything about child development. And it even affects everything about education and economic development. "If I had one magic power to solve the world's challenges, nutrition would be that power. "Nutrition belongs to the top of the list," he said.

Working where it matters

According to the report, a child's brain at birth develops 25 percent of adult size, by age

2 which is the first 1000 days, the child's brain has developed by 75 percent of adult size. Also, by age 6; greater than 90 percent of adult size.

To improve what will shape a child's lifelong chance for health during the first 1000 days, it becomes critical to ensure that the foundation for a child's future well-being is built.

"Good nutrition during the first 1000 days provides the building blocks for healthy brain development," said Ada Ezeogu, UNICEF nutrition specialist.

"Maternal diet and nutrient stores are the only sources of nutrition for a developing baby; women must get healthier and nutritious food before and during pregnancy."

While it is also necessary to build a child's health, a far start in life and prosperity, this incredible transformation is dependent on the nutrients (Folic acid, iron, zinc and iodine as well as protein) that the baby gets from his or her mother.

The absence of one or more of these nutrients during pregnancy places the baby at risk for developmental delay, birth defects and cognitive deficits.

There is evidence suggesting that the health effects of poor nutrition and adverse experiences early in life can pass down from one generation to the next.

There are, however, proven interventions to address these problems and save millions of lives within this window of opportunity.

In doing this, National Orientation Agency (NOA), Lagos in collaboration with UNICEF on Thursday 9, March organised a media advocacy meeting for COVAX and Routine Immunisation uptake in Lagos.

However, highlighting the major roles of media in promoting behaviours in the first 1000 days and a call to action to be involved and contribute immensely to practice to increase the chances of a child's survival in the state.

Speaking on increasing a child's chance of survival by focusing on the first 1000 days, Aderonke Akinola-Akinwale, social behavioural change specialist, said the first 1000 days presents the first window of opportunity to invest in a child's chance of survival, being healthy, learning and thrive.

"The areas of focus are on the health in antenatal care, routine immunisation, nutrition, early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding, improved hygiene practice and, child protection in birth registration and female genital mutilation."

The great start for a child begins from the day the child is conceived in the womb, delivered and cared for in a clean and protected manner," she said.

Strengthening the health system by identifying bottlenecks, prioritising actions and building capacities at primary health care and community levels has shown dramatic reductions in under-five deaths and improvement in coverage

and access to care.

The following practice has been shown to improve results along the first 1000 days, improving linkages with early childhood development centres in communities with primary care clinics including building capacities of these practitioners for growth monitoring, improved early identification of problems in children and referrals to care.

Cristian Munduate, UNICEF Nigeria's country representative, said: "Investing in children is investing in human capital. The right to health, nutrition and care, especially during the first 1000 days of life, can have a significant impact on a child's ability to live, grow, learn, and rise out of poverty. It can break the cycle of poverty for families, communities, and countries, and shape a society's long-term stability and prosperity."

Driving awareness

The advocacy meeting tends to address and inspire the media to shape the knowledge of caregivers and advocate for policy-makers to promote the practice of the key behaviour in the first 1000 days.

Akinwale, who helps to coordinate training for media in benefiting states. "we are engaging the media because it is the fourth estate of the realm. Media is a segment of society that has an indirect but key role in influencing the political system primarily as a watchdog.

She explained that the media has the power to influence the populace by providing the necessary and factual information about the first 1000 days' reality, prevalence and impact on child's nutrition and development in Nigeria.

"We are seeing the impact of this advocacy, but it's slow. For instance, looking at breastfeeding compared within 10 years, we have moved from 22 to 24 percent but have yet to meet the international target which is 50 percent," Ada Ezeogu

"We will keep engaging the media, we urge for more to provide continuous and consistent information on emerging issues around 1000 days, educate the public, and leverage on regular channels of interaction with caregivers."

Feature

How increased women's empowerment can foster growth

JOSEPHINE OKOJIE

Women's participation in the economy has seen some improvement across the African continent. For instance, Africa has the highest number of women entrepreneurs in the world, according to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Maximising this impressive women's contribution to the economy is key to reducing poverty on the continent. The poverty level in Africa is not abating. According to the Institute of Security Studies (ISS), a knowledge-building institute that is focused on developing the continent, citizens in 10 of the 54 countries on the continent are experiencing a deep level of poverty.

As it stands, it is imperative to keep raising the level of women's participation in the economy. It is believed that such growth action will deliver more support for local households, shore up incomes and enhance the continent's combined gross national productivity rating.

Meanwhile, Nigeria, one of the top economies on the continent, continues to prioritize women's empowerment as a path to enriching its economy. Presently, the country is seeing many private-led initiatives targeted at broadening the scope of women's empowerment, in support of the Federal Government's economic growth agenda.

One of the organisations driving Nigerian women's empowerment agenda is Olam Agri in Nigeria, a leading agribusiness in food, feed, and fibre.

In 2021 the organisation launched the Seeds for the Future project, a wheat value chain development effort, to improve the food security position of the country.

The effort later metamorphosed into a full-fledged corporate social investment (CSI) vehicle focused on promoting national food security, women empowerment, support for farmers, skill building, food fortification, and carbon reduction within the host market.

As part of the CSI vehicle, the business launched the Crown Flour Angels (CFA) initiative. The CFA is a women's community-building and economic empowerment initiative.

It was borne out of the need to equip more women with baking skills and enhance their earnings while enabling



them to contribute meaningfully to their community and the national economy.

"We believe that an investment in human capital development on a broader scale will engender national prosperity, and investment in educating women is key to enhancing the livelihoods of families," said Ashish Pande, Olam Agri's country head while speaking about the empowerment initiative.

"The Crown Flour Angels initiative is targeted at equipping keen women with the requisite baking skills to enhance their earning potential."

Through the CFA initiative, Olam Agri in Nigeria trained and provided baking tools for 250 International Cake Exploration Société (ICES) women in Lagos in 2022.

The trainees were further certified by the National Business & Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) to enable them to find deeper relevance in the industry, especially in helping them take up working roles in the hospitality sector or setting up their baking businesses.

Recently, it followed up the successful training of the ICES women with the launch of a baking academy in Kano.

The baking academy offers a scaled support framework for women across the northern region. The advantages

presented by the baking academy are numerous.

Aspiring bakers will be able to earn a certificate and industry-specific knowledge that will help sharpen their competitive edge in the targeted industry.

The teachers in the baking school are experienced professionals who have gained knowledge in the industry through many years of working in the field.

The students will learn a wide range of baking skills from these eminent teachers who will shape their future for good. Also, the students will get hands-on experience in a live kitchen.

To underline the economic importance of the project, the Emir of Kano, Aminu Ado Bayero, who was present at the launch, applauded Olam Agri in Nigeria.

He remarked, "Olam Agri in Nigeria has done well by locating this academy in Kano State. The academy will help build our community by giving our women the opportunity to learn the skills that will yield good incomes for their households when put to commercial use."

Bola Adeniji, head of marketing at Olam Agri in Nigeria, noted, "The launch of the baking academy offers a scaled support framework for women across the northern regions, and the choice of Kano is strategic."

"The global bakery product market size was \$397.90 billion in 2020. The market is projected to reach \$590.54 billion in 2028. This growth projection presents an opportunity for bakers, including graduates from our baking academy," she said.

"We are proud to be launching our women into this prosperous market through our initiative," she added.

Through the participation of private organisations in supporting women, Nigeria is taking an important stride towards reducing poverty and achieving wider economic development. Other African countries need to follow suit as a sound path of raising the living standards of the people.

The growing inclusion of women on companies' boards is a fine indicator of the importance of education in scaling the genders' roles in driving socioeconomic growth. As of 2018, women held 23.4 percent of the top board positions on the boards of leading African companies.

This indicator supports the assertion by Gurudatt Kakkar, the pro-chancellor of India's Career Point University, that education, which includes access to skill acquisition platforms such as the baking academy, improves women's productivity level, and would increase a woman's future earnings by around 15 percent.

Fashion Talk

Toxic ingredients in skin care, cosmetics products to avoid

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

You hardly find anyone who would just pick up a body lotion from a mall or shop shelf without going through a guide or a leaflet that speaks to the content of the lotion.

While some may be quick to look at the functions, it is also important to read up the content. What is inside a lotion may not be as innocent as it looks. There are dozens of ingredients currently being used in top-brand body lotions that range from questionable to potentially hazardous.

In an article by Rodalesorganiclife.com, it explains the top six toxic ingredients to look out for when scanning body lotion labels.

DMDM Hydantoin

This mysterious-sounding ingredient is a type of formaldehyde-releasing preservative used in a host of personal care items, including body lotion. (Formaldehyde releasers are used in 20 percent of all cosmetics and personal care products, according to the Environmental Working Group). It's an irritant for eyes and skin, and while there's no evidence that DMDM hydantoin itself is a carcinogen, formaldehyde definitely is. And if there's an impurity in the DMDM Hydantoin used in your moisturizer, there's a chance that formaldehyde is present.

Butylated Hydroxyanisole (BHA)

BHA is a food preservative and stabilizer that routinely shows up in body lotions, as well as everything from lipstick to yeast infection treatments. But beware—it's an endocrine disruptor and "reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen," according to the National Toxicology Program.

Parabens

You'll find parabens in practically all popular commercial body lotions (just look for butylparaben, isobutylparaben, methylparaben, propylparaben, or ethylparaben on the label). They prevent bacteria and fungus from growing in your favorite bottle of moisturizer,



which would be great if they weren't linked to hormone disruption and breast cancer. Luckily, manufacturers of organic lotions have found safer ways to keep their products fungus-free, like using vitamin E and citric acid, though these products tend to have a shorter shelf life than those that contain parabens. A safe one to try: Wildcraft Organic Lemongrass Body Cream.

Fragrance + Parfum

You may think it's nice that your lotion smells like strawberries and cream, but there's no way that scent is natural. When you see "fragrance" or "parfum" on a label, read "a toxic mix of chemicals the manufacturer doesn't want to tell you about."

Most notably, this includes diethyl phthalate, according to the Environmental Working Group.

You may have already heard of phthalates since they're used in just about everything from cosmetics to insecticides to

wood finishes—and they're known to be endocrine disruptors and toxic to organ systems. Synthetic fragrances like the ones used in lotions also emit harmful VOCs, which pollute indoor air quality and cause respiratory allergies and asthma.

Triethanolamine

This mouthful of an ingredient is a highly alkaline substance that's used to balance the pH in various body lotions and cosmetics (especially mascara).

Despite its widespread use, it's considered moderately dangerous and should never be used long-term, according to the Dermatology Review, since it's a skin and respiratory irritant and toxicant to the immune system.

It's also been linked to cancer in animal studies. Though triethanolamine is considered biodegradable and nontoxic to animals and organisms, wastewater released from manufacturing plants



containing large amounts of triethanolamine can significantly alter the pH of rivers and streams, resulting in toxic shock to marine life.

Retinyl palmitate

Retinyl palmitate, the most controversial form of vitamin A, is a vitamin A derivative that you'll see in some sunscreens,

as well as lotions and creams advertised to have anti-aging properties. A study published by the National Toxicology Program found that mice exposed to retinyl palmitate developed a frightening number of tumors after exposure to sunlight. If you're going to use lotions that contain retinyl palmitate, do so at night.

News Extra

Atiku demands INEC's compliance with Court orders on inspection of materials

...As PDP calls for Mahmoud's resignation

TONY AILEMEN, Abuja

The Presidential Candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar has demanded immediate compliance by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), with court order on access, inspection and examination of electoral materials.

The PDP also on Friday, demanded immediate resignation of the INEC Chairman, Mahmoud Yakubu.

The party also called on the Police, DSS to investigate INEC chairman for alleged electoral offences, as well as international sanctions for undermining democracy.

The party reviewed the widely-condemned infractions, brazen violation of the provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022 and criminal manipulation and alteration of election results by the Prof. Mahmood Yakubu-led Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to subvert the Will of Nigerians in the February 25, 2023 Presidential and National Assembly Elections.

The PDP also said that it had reviewed the latest scheme by INEC to reconfigure the BVAS devices, erase and destroy evidence of its manipulation of the Presidential election, deny Nigerians and political parties, especially our Party and Candidate access to relevant information required to prosecute our case at the Presidential Election Tribunal.

"From all indications, the INEC under Mahmood Yakubu was compromised to rig the election by brazenly violating the provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022 as well as INEC's Regulations, Guidelines and Manual issued for the election.

"It is also obvious that the Commission under Mahmood Yakubu deliberately sabotaged the uploading and transmission of results directly from the Poll-

ing Units to give room for the criminal mutilation, alteration and switching of election results across the nation in favour of the APC as now abundantly exposed in the pictorial and video evidence of compromised results sheets in many parts of the Country," it said.

The party's National Publicity Secretary, Debo Ologunabga, stated that "evidence abounds in States across the six Geo-Political Zones of the Country where winning figures lawfully scored by the PDP were switched in favour of the APC; where results sheet from polling centers won by the PDP were destroyed and replaced with fake results sheets in which APC was allocated unearned winning figures.

"This further explains why the INEC Chairman rushed to announce and declare manipulated results that were not transmitted directly from the Polling Units to INEC's Server/Website and ignored the objections and complaints raised during the collation of results in deliberate violation of the provisions of Section 64 (4) (a) and (b), 64 (6) (a)-(d), and 65 (1) (c) of the Electoral Act, 2022.

"For emphasis while Section 64 (4) (a) and (b) expressly require the INEC Chairman as the Chief Returning Officer to announce only results that were transmitted directly from the Polling Units, Sections 64 (6) (a)-(d) and 65 (1) (c) compel INEC, in the case of disputes, complaints or objections regarding a collated result or the result of an election from any Polling Unit, to take steps including the review of collation where they are made contrary to the provisions of the Law, Regulations, Guidelines and Manual issued for the election.

"By flagrantly violating these provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022 as well as INEC's Regulations, Guidelines and Manual for the election, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu is not only culpable of serious electoral offence but also betrayed,



Atiku

thrashed and threw overboard the trust, confidence and hope Nigerians reposed in him and the Electoral Commission to deliver a free, fair and credible election in the country."

Joe-Kyari Gadzama, the lead counsel of the Atiku Abubakar's Legal Team in a letter to the INEC Chairman demanded immediate compliance with the court order of 3 March, 2023 granting access to Atiku Abubakar for access, inspection and examination of electoral materials of the February 25 presidential election.

Gadzama in the letter, said he wrote as the Lead Counsel to Atiku Abubakar and the Peoples Democratic Party, who participated in the 2023 Presidential Election which held on 25 February 2023, and on whose behalf we write in respect of the above caption.

He recalled that the Court of Appeal, presided over by Justice Shagbaor Ikyegh, JCA sitting

in Abuja, granted orders on 3 March 2023 in favour of Atiku Abubakar for access to the materials.

"The Court expressly directed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to allow and grant access to our Clients and their representatives to inspect, scan, make copies, forensically audit and obtain certified true copies (CTC) of all electoral materials which were used in the conduct of the Presidential Election.

"The Court in Order no. 6 specifically allowed our Clients to carry out forensic examination/analysis of the BVAS machines/devices and all information stored in the server/IREV/backend/clouds, amongst others. The enrolled Court Order was duly and promptly served on the Commission on the same 3 March 2023 by the Court bailiff accompanied by our Clients' representatives."

Gadzama attached the ac-

knowledgeed copy of the Court Order for ease of reference, adding that "It is our Clients' brief that upon service of the Order, they immediately Page 2 of 3 requested for a date to follow up and they were asked to return on 6 March 2023.

"On 6 March, our Clients' representatives led by Adedamola Fanokun, Esq (office of the PDP National Legal Adviser) returned to the Commission ready to commence inspection, examination and obtaining of the electoral materials as ordered by the Court but they were informed at the Commission's legal registry that there was no instruction yet from the Commission on the Court Order.

"Our Clients further requested audience with the Commission's Director of Litigation to accelerate the process but they were not allowed as they were told by the Registry staff that the Director was in a meeting. Sad-

ly, these and other efforts by our Clients have yielded no result."

He said that it was disturbing that despite service of the Court Order on the Commission since 3 March 2023, the Commission is yet to allow their Clients and their representatives to access, inspect and/or obtain the needed electoral materials as ordered by the Court despite repeated visits to the Commission and follow-up in respect thereof.

"No doubt, the Commission is bound by the orders of the Court and cannot choose if, when and/or how to comply with same.

"The unqualified obligation of the Commission, which of course includes INEC officials, is to unhesitatingly comply and give effect to the subsisting order of Court; there is no discretion to exercise here," he said.

According to him, "In the circumstances, we hereby demand that the Commission should immediately comply with the subsisting orders of Court and in particular, we reiterate the following demands on behalf of our Clients:

1) Daily access to all polling documents, voters register, ballot papers and electoral forms/materials for purposes of scanning, forensic audit, expert examination and inspection;

2) Daily access to the BVAS machines/devices and server/IREV/backend/clouds for purposes of forensic examination and analysis; and

3) CTCs of all BVAS accreditation reports, forms EC40A, EC8A, EC8AVP, EC8C, EC8D, EC8E and all other electoral forms/materials on a State by State basis. We hope that our demand will receive the prompt positive action that it requires as we will continue to visit the Commission on a daily basis Page 3 of 3 for the exercise as set out above in line with the subsisting order of the Court. Thank you in anticipation of your urgent positive action in this regard as time is really of the essence."

IWD 2023: KloverHarris harps on innovative technology in promoting gender equality

IFEOMA OKEKE
- KORIEOCHA

In the spirit of International Women's Day 2023, KloverHarris Limited, an indigenous human capital consultancy company, specialising in Learning and Development, Human Resource Outsourcing, Business Consulting, and Information Technology has advocated for women to be involved in innovative and technological solutions in a bid to bridge the gap in gender

inequality and ensure the developmental needs of women and girls are met in the society.

Bukola Ariyibi, managing partner, KloverHarris Limited, disclosed the company's support for women while marking this year's International Women's Day 2023, themed: 'DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality'. She urged corporate and public institutions in Nigeria and around the world to imbibe digital culture and innovative technology in promoting gender equality that will make women more inclusive in societal development.



Bukola Ariyibi

"At KloverHarris, our values of innovation, people and knowledge has helped to facilitate improved access to quality knowledge translation and encouraged the participation of women and other stakeholders in our learning programmes. We have seen that women can be innovators too and contribute to all sectors of the economy around the globe," she said.

International Women's Day is a global holiday celebrated annually on March 8 as a focal point in the women's rights movement, bringing attention to issues such as gender equal-

ity, reproductive rights, violence and abuse against women.

KloverHarris Limited is a global consulting firm that has carved a niche for itself with its unique approach to innovative business solutions. It sets a benchmark by measuring the existing delivery processes of its clientele, and how they align their strategic goals and objectives in line with global best practices and innovative methodologies for growth. With this insight, the firm develops a bespoke road map for each client and monitors progress - applying interactive

feedback - along the path to achieving their vision.

Some of its business offerings include Customized Training Solutions; Evaluation and Assessments; Content Development and Planning; E-learning Solutions; Pension Enrolment with reputable PFAs; Payroll processing and Management; Organisational Health; Executive Placements; Strategy; Legal Regulatory and Compliance Support; Tax Management and Advisory Services; IT Training and Assessment and Bespoke Products and Innovations.

NewsExtra

NEM Insurance embraces equity to mark International Women's Day

SEYI JOHN SALAU

In commemoration of the 2023 International Women's Day, NEM Insurance Plc, has called for a more strengthened corporate environment as a means of deepening the business ecosystem to promote gender equity in Nigeria.

"Interestingly, the theme for this year's International Women's Day celebration is 'Embrace Equity'. I totally align myself with this theme given my adherence to the principle of fairness and being a strong believer that everyone should be given equal treatment irrespective of gender," Tope Smart, the group managing director and CEO, NEM Insurance Plc group.

Smart in a goodwill message felicitated with the women, stated that the International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural,



Caption L-R:

Olayinka Ojikutu, group head, human resources; Bolanle Baruwa, group head, underwriting; Moyosola Olayinka Okeremi, assistant general manager, Marketing; Mojisola Teluwo, deputy general manager, corporate services, and Olajumoke Philip-Akede, group executive (company secretary), all of NEM Insurance Plc, during activities marking the International Women's Day 2023, held at NEM Insurance head office in Lagos.

and political achievements of women. Accordingly, he stated further that the day

also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

"As we celebrate this year's edition of International Women's Day, I join numer-

ous well-wishers all over the world to celebrate all women and not forgetting our won-

derful amazons in NEM Insurance Plc group.

"In our group today, many departments and units are headed by wonderful women, while some of our branches are equally managed by them and I must not fail to mention that they have performed extraordinarily well in the discharge of their responsibilities," Smart stated.

Significant activities are witnessed worldwide as groups come together to celebrate women's achievements or rally for women's equality. IWD has been marked for over a century, with the first gathering in 1911 supported by over a million people.

"As we celebrate International Women's Day today, I enjoin everyone in NEM to please celebrate these amazing women even as I look forward to having more of them in our fold as they have proven to be indispensable pillars in our society. Once again, congratulations and happy International Women's Day," Smart concludes.

IWD: Foundation calls for improved localisation of technology

SEYI JOHN SALAU

Human Development Initiatives Foundation (HDI), in commemorating the International Women's Day (IWD) 2023, has called on both private and public institutions to make rural women the minimum standard in the design and implementation of their programmes, innovations and technology.

Accordingly, HDI maintained that technology and innovations have changed the way we live and will continue to define human existence, including social and economic life.

"Without a deliberate gender approach to its design and application, more girls will be out of school, hunger and poverty will continue to increase and ultimately the existing inequality will continue to grow," Olufunso Owasanoye, executive director, HDI, said in a press statement to commemorate the 2023 IWD, themed, 'DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality'. According to the 2021 World Bank data, women constitute almost half of Nigeria's population at 49.5



per cent, a good number of whom are in rural communities and in small and medium-scale enterprises spread across the country.

Consequently, any innovation or technology that is gender-blind has a high propensity to further exclude women who are one of the greatest assets of the nation.

Technology and financial inclusion for poor and rural women are in the best interest of everyone as their participation would improve the economy.

"For instance, the impact

of the current government's cashless policy on many homes in Nigeria attests to the reality that the country needs technology and financial inclusion more now than ever, especially for rural women who are largely unbanked and solely depend on cash for their daily survival," Owasanoye stated.

According to her, creating accessible, affordable and easy-to-use innovations and technology will not only improve the quality of life of most families but also reflate the economy of the country,

as women constitute a significant asset in the production value chain.

In achieving a greater and sustainable digitALL society for gender equality in Nigeria, Human Development Initiatives Foundation called on the government at all levels to re-engineer the education system to encourage girls to venture into the field of science and technology, which is currently dominated by males.

Furthermore, in the spirit of the International Women's Day 2023, HDI encouraged men to celebrate and support women and girls to embrace technology and innovation to build an equitable society.

"As part of today's celebration, Human Development Initiatives Foundation will be presenting a token to indigent mothers of children with disabilities for their courage and resilience," Owasanoye stated.

The foundation equally urged the government to remove all economic and socio-cultural barriers that limit girls from dreaming big, and called for more sensitization and awareness in rural communities on existing hands-on digital platforms that promote financial inclusion.

Rite Foods advocates women's inclusion in digital transformation

Rite Foods, Nigeria's food and beverage company has called for the involvement of women in technological advancement in the country as their contribution would help bridge gender inequality and inclusiveness desired for a progressive nation.

Seleem Adegunwa, the managing director of Rite Foods, has urged corporate and public organisations to take gender equity as a top-most priority as the gap in digital access would keep women from unlocking technology's full potential.

He made this assertion while marking this year's International Women's Day (IWD) with the theme 'DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality'. Adegunwa affirmed that women, having acted as great mothers at home with exceptional qualities, would do well if given equal chance like their male counterparts, in the digital transformation process that is experienced in various sectors of the economy, especially in the technological development of the nation.

Celebrated on March 8 ev-

ery year, IWD was adopted by the United Nations in 1975 to spread the message of gender equality to create a better society free of gender bias. It addresses issues such as women's equal rights, violence and abuse against women, and reproductive rights.

According to Adegunwa, Rite Foods with its state-of-the-art infrastructure and artificial intelligence in a first-rate factory has women working in all units, with the innovation required for the production of unparalleled brands that have dictated the pace in the food and beverage sector.

Boluwatife Adedugbe, assistant brand manager, Rite Foods, avowed that the beverage company is a great workplace for women with creativity and greater opportunities for a better future. "Rite Foods' unique brands with their refreshing flavours have won numerous laurels in the industry, as its Bigi Cola in 2022, won "The Fastest Growing Cola Brand of the Year" at the Marketing Edge Brands and Advertising Excellence Awards held in Lagos".

Travel

Sustained improvement on visa openness sets Africa on robust intra travels, exchanges

BY OBINNA EMELIKE

If you consider the fact that Africa receives a mere 4.8 percent of the over one billion tourist arrivals in the world and 3.3 percent of the receipts, it means that the continent is not at the heart of the global tourist market, despite being taunted as the last tourism frontier of the world today.

The worst is that intra-African travels have not performed well until recently, when some concerned African countries, corporations and tourism thought-leaders started making concerted efforts at growing tourism on the continent, starting from within.

The worry for most of them is that for the 1.4 billion people in Africa, (based on latest United Nations estimates of 1.425, 078, 203), less than 10 percent travel within Africa for tourism, while the continent received over 45 million international visitors in 2022, almost double of 19.4 million in 2021 and about 65 percent of its pre-pandemic visitor numbers, UNWTO barometer.

However, the efforts at growing tourism within are yielding results with improvements on intra-African travels as captured in the 2022 Africa Visa Openness Index report.

The 2022 Africa Visa Openness Index (AVOI) report, released last December in Mauritius, revealed sustained improvements on visa policies across Africa, particularly progress in freedom of travel policies by many countries last year.

The feat is a welcome devel-



opment, which in turn, is soaring intra-African travel.

The visa openness report, an annual publication, prepared by the African Development Bank Group in collaboration with the African Union Commission, tracks visa policies adopted by African governments on three main criteria: whether entry to citizens from other African countries is visa-free, if a visa on arrival can be obtained, and whether travellers are required to obtain visas ahead of traveling to other African countries.

According to the AVOI re-

port, in 2022, 93 percent of African countries maintained or improved their score on visa openness relative to 2021; while two-thirds of African countries have adopted more liberal visa policies compared to six years ago.

The above, in practical terms, means that more Africans travelled round the continent in 2022, despite the lingering impact of the pandemic, almost till the last quarter of 2021.

But while African travel was more open to African citizens in 2022, with fewer restrictions,

more people were encouraged to travel with visa-free and visa-on-arrival options, which were not available years ago.

Of course, Benin, The Gambia and the Seychelles made the most impact in the AVOI report 2022 with their generous visa-free entry to all Africans visiting their respective countries, while Burundi, Djibouti and Ethiopia, made the most progress in their visa openness, but did not issue free visa.

Though just three countries out of 54 on the continent offer visa-free, it is an improve-

ment from just one country that opened borders to all African countries in 2017.

While more countries are yet to follow the Benin, The Gambia and the Seychelles examples, there is an improvement on the offer of eVisa with 24 African countries offering eVisa, reflecting about five more countries than five years ago.

As well, visa openness is gaining more tractions as 36 countries improved or maintained their index score since 2016, 50 countries have maintained or improved their index score relative to 2021, 48 countries out of 54, now offer visa-free travel to the nationals of at least one other African country, while 42 countries offer visa-free travel to the nationals of at least five other African countries.

But it is not impressive that lower income countries account for a large share of the countries that make up the top-20 ranked countries in 2022 with liberal visa policies as this trend implies that Africa's top economies such as Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa are still restricting African visitors from entering their countries.

If not for tourism, most Africans will not visit Benin, The Gambia and the Seychelles, which offer visa-free entry, but the many going for business, MICE, and holidays across the big economies will have to face visa challenge, a development that poses huge challenges to intra-African travel.

Despite the attitude of some big African economies towards visa openness, the African Union thinks the feats of the 2022 index

are worth celebrating, while attributing the improvements to key developments like the AfCFTA.

"This edition links free movement to the development of regional value chains, investments, trade in services and the AfCFTA. There is greater recognition that human mobility is key to Africa's integration efforts," Monique Nsazabaganwa, deputy chairperson, African Union Commission, said.

The African Development Bank Group attributed the feats in the 2022 index to supportive and enforced visa policies.

"This year's edition, the seventh, shows many African countries having greatly simplified their visa regime over the past year," Marie-Laure Akin-Olugbade, acting vice president in charge of Regional Development, Integration and Business Delivery, African Development Bank Group, said.

Also impressed with the 2022 index report, Jean-Guy Afrika, acting director in charge of the Regional Integration Coordination Office, African Development Bank Group, disclosed that the continent has returned to a level of visa openness last seen just before the pandemic began.

Corroborating the visa openness index report, African Airlines Association said local airlines had exceeded their 2019 pre-covid operation levels on international routes by 2.28 percent, meaning some have opened new domestic and international routes because of improved visa policies adopted by more African countries.

African Tourism Board appoints Didier Bayeye as Global Ambassador

The African Tourism Board has appointed Didier Bayeye, renowned African tourism expert, as global ambassador in recogni-

tion of his tireless promotion of Africa travel and tourism.

The appointment was ratified with the presentation of certificate to the recipient at

the just concluded Meetings Africa event in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The certificate signed by Cuthbert Ncube, president of the African Tourism Board, confers on Didier Bayeye the recognition of an African Tourism champion constantly promoting inter-Africa relations through travel, tourism and international trade.

"We at the African Tourism Board are proud of the works and efforts of Didier Bayeye in promoting travel and tourism in Africa. It is important that Africans see inter-Africa travel and trade as a collective responsibility as we all strive to make our continent better," Ncube stated.



Women take 'centre stage' in tourism development

To mark International Women's Day on March 8, 2023, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and UN Women have jointly reaffirmed their commitment to keep women's empowerment 'Centre Stage' of tourism development.

With the 'Centre Stage' model we can help the sector work for women and we will not stop until the girls of tomorrow have the same opportunities as the men of today

UNWTO research has previously shown the enormous potential of the tourism sector to empower women of all backgrounds. Fifty-four per cent of the global tourism workforce is female, the gender-wage gap is lower in tourism, and the proportion of women in leadership roles

is higher than in other sectors. However, much progress is still to be made. Women are still concentrated in lower-paid, precarious and often informal work. Furthermore, UNWTO research has revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic hit women in tourism harder than men. For instance, women were more likely to lose their job, have their hours or pay reduced and to shoulder more care responsibilities in all of the countries surveyed.

UNWTO Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili, said "UNWTO has worked with our partners to study and document the huge contribution women make to tourism. Now it is time for tourism to give back. With the 'Centre Stage' model we can help the sector work for women and

we will not stop until the girls of tomorrow have the same opportunities as the men of today."

The pioneering 'Centre Stage' project was launched in 2021 to address this imbalance and expand tourism's place in the development agenda and women's empowerment. Created by UNWTO, BMZ and UN Women, the project is geared towards creating a people-centred model for tourism development that puts the needs of women at its heart. In bringing together the public sector with tourism businesses and civil society organizations, the project directly trained 1,800 people, saw 2,826 women get a promotion, surveyed 27,000 people and reached over 20 million in a global awareness raising campaign.

Interview

Shift to renewable sources is inevitable in the real estate sector – Tunde Cash

Tade Cash, chief executive officer, Wealth Island Properties Africa, a real estate investment and development company, speaks on the gaps and challenges facing the industry in this interview with CHUKA UROKO. He also speaks on other salient issues in the real estate sector. Excerpts:

What is your projection for property investment in Nigeria in the coming years?

My projection is that despite a couple of people moving out of Nigeria, the population of the country still makes it the biggest consumer market for a lot of products, including housing. For instance, in Lagos, looking at the next decade with the growing population and being the fifth largest economy in Africa, housing will be in high demand.

There are some people who would not be able to afford to live again in the city because it is going to be one of the most expensive cities to live in. The value of land in Lagos would become a gold mine, and people that can positively take advantage of this anticipation now would be lucky then.

How do you think the securities exchange could help the real estate sector in Nigeria?

What differentiates real estate and the securities market which is also called 'paper assets' for now, is both markets' elasticity to inflation. I give credit to some of the industry pioneers who are listed on the Nigerian Exchange Limited and are leveraging public funds to expand the real estate market. The size of the market presently does put some limitations on the attractiveness of real estate as an investment portfolio.

Whereas the industry provides a magnificent cushion against inflation, it is, for now, still attractive as a unilateral portfolio for a company that does not have other baskets of products that can assure investors. Private placements can work, but that will have to come from a place of experience, proven track records and, most of all, the depth of the team promoting the investment. A paper asset is real but can be a difficult vehicle to invest in from the property's perspective. But I dare say there are exceptional cases, and I give credit to those who have pushed those boundaries.

Why has there been a gap in raising funds from government institutions to help the real estate market?

The real estate market in Nigeria is quite interesting as it presents a lot of opportunities at the same time. One of the issues we face today is short-term funding for long-term projects, as opposed to long-term funding.

The real estate industry is a unique ecosystem and being where a unilateral approach to pricing only complicates its functioning. As a developer, the proposal of short-term funding can be overwhelming for practitioners and promoters of projects.

In Wealth Island Properties, we do what is called 'Urban Development' which deals with revitalizing cities and abandoned or marginal lands. These are capital-intensive ventures that involves seeking government approvals and consents, allowing access to those lands and approving the works which basi-



cally is salvaging the difficult terrains through engineering solutions. Funds for these are usually invested with the hope that the solutions we are deploying will run through a course of time before the natural space is finally transformed.

So, dealing with the financial houses on our projects has been very difficult because the short-term perspectives only pile pressure on us and most of the time is not realistic for our business plans. I am hopeful that one day some of the financial houses in the country will see value in long-term investing.

What kind of impact do you think high inflationary pressure will leave on the real estate sector?

I think before work, a home is needed. Again, the trend that has merged the workplace and the home into one also puts pressure on exclusive commercial real estate. While this is not totally forgoing the value it holds, and I must say the value is very significant, it is our deliberate strategy in Wealth Island Property to be focused on the fundamentals through the residential development.

The fifth biggest economy in Africa is also the commercial nerve center of Nigeria, and that automatically underscores the purpose of commercial development in the state. The potential is huge and can't be undermined, but as I said earlier, our strategy is to foray into that through mix-development.

How has the current increasing rate of inflation affected your company?

Inflation has been a major challenge to all sectors of Nigeria's economy. It has been a huge growth impediment to the real estate sector. However, one of the ways to navigate these issues is by buying

that, as a 21st-century real estate firm, bringing the comfort of housing to the populace will naturally empower them.

Recently though we have evolved into building mixed-developments which we call a freedom lifestyle apartment, connoting that people can live within these apartments and also work. All these are what the industry has pivoted to from the recent disruption that Covid enabled.

The goal of mixed development is to create an environment that promotes living and working in the same space, cutting out commuting marginally or even totally while forging a healthy community that promotes a deliberate lifestyle.

What is your opinion on renewable energy as an alternative energy source for the real estate industry?

There have been calls for real estate practitioners to prioritise renewable sources of energy due to the global shift towards the reduction of carbon emissions. This is an inevitable reality; global warming, carbon emissions, and ozone layer depletion are keywords for the environment, and as developers, we are well aware of the risk we are facing.

For us, all our developments are built to be adaptable to renewable energy sources. In one of our developments in Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos, we harnessed wind energy to generate power. Because of its nearness to the Atlantic Ocean, we have developments across the city where solar energy and alternate power sources are installed.

In a nutshell, I believe we are aligned with the global shift, but I just think we should have more government support, in terms of standardization of alternative energy devices, so we can have a direction. It is definitely a way to go.

You have just talked about global shift to renewables. How can real estate practitioners align with this shift that has become a global trend?

I believe developers and stakeholders can come together to standardize the infrastructure for a sustainable environment. And I believe it starts with the government setting benchmarks through policy enactment for different elements of the environment.

The salinity of the water, sand component and mixture, cement mixture, iron rods, up till electronics that are high on voltage consumption and regulation electrification are to be considered. The amount of electricity consumption of an average apartment is designed into the building from the start and all these elements come together to affect the environment at the event.

I believe that when we remember that at some point Lagos will become the most populous city in the world by 2100—about 77 years from now—the urgency to regulate housing will become a matter of urgency.

Has your company, in any way, benefited from real estate products such as the Real Estate In-

vestment Trust (REIT)?

We have not benefited from the Real Estate Investment Trust in Nigeria. There are many things that you cannot keep waiting for, and you have to find alternatives. The important thing is to ascertain if it is a fair-playing atmosphere. For us, we have no access to any of this funding except for private investor funding, which comes from those who believe in the vision and are ready to key into it.

The mortgage structure in Nigeria is evolving, and you can be rest assured that they are on-boarding a lot of properties onto the programme, more than at any other time in the history of the country, but with the growing population and the need to properly verify recipients, the issue of social trust, and innumerable complications and an identity management quagmire, we may not be able to say it is perfect yet.

I am sure the government is also concerned and working to solve the problem. From the private sector, it will help us reach the mass housing market, especially with government backing; hence, we are building our systems in readiness.

How is your company positioning for the population surge projected to happen in the country?

We are one of the major investors in mainland properties, and the reason I said this is because Lagos started on the mainland and is coming back. The signs are there.

We have a couple of properties; however, one of the prime ones is at Magodo Central at Magodo Phase 2 in Lagos. We are building more than 20 acres of land to create more avenues for residential accommodations. This is what we are bringing to society to meet the housing needs in Lagos.

Why do higher interest rates cause real estate purchase prices to decline?

This definitely discourages developers like us from entering into financial transactions with institutions that peddle such rates. For the housing needs we are trying to meet, it's just sensible to shake hands with investors who can move at your pace and won't dump additional risk on you and your stakeholders.

According to a recent report, over 70 percent of the global population will migrate to urban centres by 2050. We are near that figure in Nigeria already. Today, Lagos accounts for nearly 11 percent of Nigeria's population, and the lack of proper planning that should have preceded such development is biting back at us now.

That is why the infrastructural development moves by Lagos such as the fourth mainland bridge and the Light rail project are a welcome development. I believe adjoining states like Ogun and Ondo states should also step up their game as well, as they have everything to gain as alternative cities to serve Lagos's growing population. Twenty minutes train ride from some settlements in Ondo state can be a plus to the Lagos megapolis project.

Interview

'How Middle East Energy can quicken Nigeria's green transition plan'

ADE YESUFU is the exhibition manager of energy portfolio - MEA, Informa Markets. In this interview with JOSEPHINE OKOJIE, he spoke on the recently concluded Middle East Energy conference in Dubai, UAE, and how Nigeria can meet its energy transition needs.

Can you tell us about Middle East Energy and what it entails in 2023?

Middle East Energy is the leading international trade event for the power industry. Based in Dubai, the event is a unique platform for energy leaders to explore the latest technological advancements in the energy sector while participating in relevant discourse with other leaders. This year's edition was held at the Dubai World Trade Centre from March 7 to 9, 2023 and covered a broad spectrum of energy sub-sectors including the generation, transmission & distribution of electricity, energy consumption & management, renewable & clean energy, critical & backup power, and smart solutions. Providing an inspiring view of future possibilities, Middle East Energy 2023 featured conferences to outline the blueprint for accelerating the energy transition, case studies to inspire real-world and practical solutions to energy projects and business challenges and laid the groundwork for integrating renewables into the mix.

Middle East Energy retains a strong legacy as the premier energy trade event in its 48th edition. What was the key highlight of MEE this year?

MEE has gained its reputation as the longest and most-established event in the energy industry across the MEA region through a legacy of 48 years. The event continues to connect the global energy community, allowing networking opportunities with international energy suppliers, the discovery of products and solutions that are changing the energy landscape, and the building of long-lasting business relationships that will not only help the industry to stay ahead of the competition but will enable them to diversify their energy needs. The key highlight for this year's edition was the quality of attendees across the spectrum of the event. This is a result of the constant energy-changing needs of governments and the industry at large. Middle East Energy enabled them to evolve to have a diverse, digitized, and sustainable future.

This year, MEE hosted 900+ exhibitors from 57 countries. What were the new experiences for participants?

At the event, guests explored the latest energy trends through six dedicated product sectors within a combined mega-show. These distinct sectors included Backup Generators & Critical Power, Transmission & Distribution, Renewables & Clean energy, Smart Solutions, and Energy Consumption and Management. With a 25,000+ global audience, MEE brought together everyone who mattered across the global energy sector including; energy ministers, utility decision makers, and even innovative startup leaders to participate in conversations around global energy transition, renewable hybrid solutions, and



the advancement of the global energy industry. This year, MEE also played host to a series of conferences and sessions that encouraged key discourse. This included the first-ever Strategic Conference which was a high-level forum focused on unpacking the complex opportunities and challenges in the energy and utilities sector. The technical seminar brought together success stories from leading projects, the practical application of cutting-edge research and innovation, and technological advancements in the energy and utilities sector. Lastly, the Intersolar Conference provided concentrated insights into the transformative dynamics of renewable energies around the world.

The theme of this year's edition was 'Guiding the region through the energy transition.' How did this impact the distinct product sectors highlighted at the event?

As you can tell from the theme, our focus for this year was on energy transition. This theme guided the entire planning process for the exhibition which has now seen a 20 percent growth in the dedicated renewable energy zone. The country pavilions also featured state-of-the-art renewable energy products and solutions, especially solar, and other renewable sources. The collocated Intersolar Middle East Conference was a must-attend for Nigerians and Africans who are going through a transformation process and are seeking to diversify and want to explore the latest advancement in renewable energy, energy storage, and green hydrogen.

Three pillars central to energy transition - decarbonization, financial investments, and digitalization & technologies. How did MEE address these pillars con-

cerning Nigeria and Africa's energy transition needs?

There were dedicated sessions at the Strategic Conference with government and industry experts from across Africa addressing Nigeria and Africa's energy transition needs. The panel session on Nigeria especially focused on the role of gas in a just energy transition, whilst also highlighting the framework for efficient energy financing. The conference also reviewed the best practices in controlling energy project risks, securing revenue, and putting in place adequate lender protections to ensure that investors can be comfortable providing debt finance on a non-recourse or limited recourse basis. Other sessions at

the conference provided opportunities to explore projects in Egypt, Morocco, Kenya, Zambia, Somalia, and Nigeria working to accelerate the transition to clean energy, drive energy decarbonization, and ensure efficient use of energy.

The second day was dedicated to decarbonization. I was personally looking forward to the discourse by Sule Abdulaziz who is the chairman of the executive board of West African Power Pool (WAPP) and the managing director of the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) on the roadmap to net-zero carbon implementation. I enjoyed his perspectives on what success looks like and what policies, systems, and strategies countries need to adopt to achieve universal electricity access through clean energy. Lastly, digitalization and technologies are key to advancing Africa into a future of universal electrification where energy demands are met. This is why the conference dedicated a whole day to reviewing how the power and utilities sector is harnessing the fourth industrial revolution to enable the energy transition.

Currently, the world is focusing on renewable energy, specifically green hydrogen which has exciting prospects in Africa. What opportunities were offered by MEE to support its implementation in the region and the growth of the market?

The Intersolar Conference at MEE discussed the current status of implementation and the actions required to get green hydrogen to an industrial scale. Industry experts deliberated on the economic efficiency of green hydrogen and its significance for the global economy. They shared their visions and the concrete steps toward materialization, and spoke on how political support will enable the market. A hydrogen economy at scale will complement the renewable sector to build a resilient energy system. Attendees received real-world answers, a look at upcoming investments, and debated on if existing assets can contribute to an accelerated transition.

In addition to green hydrogen, were there opportunities for discourse concerning 2023 energy trends, other renewable hybrid solutions, and their significance for Africa?

The integration of hybrid systems into the energy network will increase stability and security, reduce emissions, and lower the cost of electricity. However, to enable these advantages, there is a requirement for the electricity network to transition to a smart grid. The Strategic Conference focused on strategies companies have successfully implemented to create hybrid systems with renewables and how a smart grid should be developed to enable the effective integration of these intermittent resources. The ever-growing share of intermittent renewable power generation feeding electricity into the grid has created stability challenges for the

utility sector. This has led to further requirements for grid integration and operation. Combining different sources of renewable energy and energy storage is part of the solution and the Intersolar Conference delved deeper into hybrid solutions for the grid.

What long-term impact would you say MEE will have on Nigeria and Africa?

Affordable and reliable energy for all Africans remains an absolute priority for Africans in the next five years. Presently 600 million people, accounting for 43 percent of the total population, lack access to electricity, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries like Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda are on track for full access by 2030, offering success stories other countries can follow. In rural areas, where over 80 percent of the electricity-deprived live, mini-grids and stand-alone systems, mostly solar-based, are the most viable solutions.

Do you think Nigeria's energy sector is in a bright spot to attract new investments despite slow economic growth?

The Nigerian power sector requires immediate focus and investment. Cheap and abundant availability of power is a prerequisite for economic development, with the potential to have a multiplier effect on growth. In addition, the power sector facilitates high capital spending which promotes investment and builds economic competitiveness. To attract fresh investments, the country will need to improve several aspects along its power value chain. These include scaling up generation, transmission, and distribution capacity; driving efficiencies in utilization; and reducing transmission and distribution losses. Government, regulatory bodies, and industry participants will all play core roles with the government and regulators taking the lead to create the right investment climate and set favorable policies in place. Industry participants should focus on maintaining and overhauling failing infrastructures, implementing new technology, faster project execution, and improving operational efficiencies to accelerate Nigeria's journey towards a comprehensive transformation of its power sector.

What is Informa Market's plan for Nigeria and Africa in the coming years?

Informa Markets hopes to support Nigeria and other African countries in reaching their developmental goals toward increasing their electrification rate and making power affordable and accessible to communities that do not have access. We have a host of events occurring across the continent that will help countries industrialize by providing an enabling platform for manufacturers and suppliers to engage with local stakeholders, as well as for buyers and sellers from across the globe to develop international relationships and for investors to discover the opportunities available in the region.

How 'structureless' LP retired political bigwigs, rattled others

...As Donatus Mathew, 'Okada rider' wins House of Rep seat

BY TONY AILEMEN (Abuja) and CHARLES OGWO (Lagos)

Across the states of Nigeria, political bigwigs have embarked on high wire political meetings, alignment and realignment of forces, following the recent political tsunami, caused by the Labour Party Candidate, Peter Obi.

There is no doubt that Nigeria is currently witnessing a political Spring that has become volcanic in nature, since the entrance of Peter Obi and the Labour Party (LP) into the Presidential race, driven by the love youths have for him.

Regarded as a well organised sociological and political Spring, the movement began two years ago, when young people tried to protest what they saw as bad governance and the absence of justice, equity and fairness.

The Labour Party won a total of eleven states and the FCT, took six states hitherto controlled by the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), including; Lagos, Nsarawa, Plateau, Imo, Ebonyi and Cross River States.

Analysis of the party performance also show that Labour Party has so far won 40 seats in the 10th National Assembly, in the areas where elections have been conducted.

Results released by INEC show that the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) won 57 Senate seats; Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) 29; Labour Party (LP) six; Social Democratic Party (SDP) two; New Nigeria Peoples Party two; Young Progressives Party (YPP) one and All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) one.

Similarly, result for the lower legislative Chambers shows APC won 162 seats; PDP, 102; LP, 34; NNPP, 18; APGA, four; ADC, two; SDP, two; YPP, one.

For the youths and several other Nigerians who were suppressed during the protest, the recent election provided opportunities and Peter Obi, provided the platform through the Labour Party (LP).

The result of the election showed that for many Governors who regard Nigerias Upper Legislative House, the Senate as their retirement home got the greatest shock of their lives as only two, out of the nine outgoing Governors, got elected into the Senate.

Thus, of the sitting governors that wanted to go to the Senate, only Dave Umahi and Sani Bello of Ebonyi and Niger states respec-



Donatus Mathew

tively, were elected.

Thus, Ben Ayade (Cross River), Simon Lalong (Plateau), Abubakar Bagudu (Kebbi), Darius Ishaku (Taraba), Samuel Ortom (Benue), Okezie Ikpeazu (Abia) and Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi (Enugu), all failed to make it to the Senate.

For the first time in history, the All Progressives Congress suffered humiliating defeat to the Labour Party in Lagos State, where the President-elect, Bola Tinubu held sway for several years as governor.

For Abuja-based Lawyer, Osita Nwanjo, "Peter Obi remains the true hero of the ongoing election, whether he wins the Presidential race or not."

According to him, the "Consciousness of Nigerians was awakened by Peter Obi, the man many regarded as structureless. But they forgot that structures are built through associations. Association of like minds build structures in every given space, politically speaking and structures are controlled by caucuses."

The fear of Peter Obi and the "Obidient Movement," have now fire Ed some sitting governors/administrations to appeal to the sentiments of the electorate, ahead of the rescheduled March 18 Governorship election.

For instance Lagos state Governor Sanwo-Olu, who is seeking re-election in a bid to warm up to Lagos voters, released impounded vehicles to their owners.

Similarly, while others are now begging and wooing the hitherto relegated Christians in the far northern states, some states have suddenly increased salaries of workers, all in a bid to escape similar treatment during the March 18 gubernatorial and state Assembly elections.

"Suddenly, we now have an Obidient Movement, a structure that is larger than that of all political parties.

"What we are witnessing in Nigeria now, is a kind of frightening Sociological organic movement, with Peter Obi, as the Messianic leader.

"As you know, Peter Obi did not create the structure, he is only being employed by Nigerians because of the faith and confidence they have in him.

Kachi Ononuju, a Public Affairs analyst, in his assessment of the ongoing political process, noted that what is going on is beyond Peter Obi. "As you know, Obi is just being asked to lead and he only being employed by the downtrodden Nigerians.

"Today, the only platform strong enough for the new political movement, is the Labour Party.

"The man who many simply referred to as a trader, has ridden on the enigmatic support, provided by the young people of Nigeria, leading a relatively unknown Labour Party, into the most feared force in Nigeria today, all within just one year.

"Obi's growing popularity and acceptance is hinged on several parameters. He is loved by the citizens. He brought the party into national reckoning and consciousness, turning it into a formidable force, that is now feared by both the ruling All Progressive Congress and the Peoples Democratic Party.

For him, the "Obidient Movement is unstoppable, because it has been untainted and incorruptible."

"If you have followed the campaigns of the Labour Party and the response of Nigerians, you will notice that it is different from the traditional political campaigns.

"Obi and his running mate, Datti Ahmed are not only young and energetic, they are self made billionaires, who have successfully built empires, based on honesty and hard work."

Ibrahim Umar, Director, Legal, Information of the National Commission for Colleges of Education, sees Peter Obi's emergence as having both positive and disruptive effects on the nation's democracy.

Umar, while noting that Obi's phenomenon will go down in annals of Nigeria's democratic history, as one of the most disruptive occurrences.

He however, stated that such, where properly harnessed, has the positive effect of helping to fight against government by gerontocracy.

Umar also noted that irrespective of the inroads and successes made by the Labour Party, it will take the LP and Peter Obi time to effectively take hold of the institutions of governance.

"There are no differences amongst the political parties, they are all the same and therefore, there is nothing different from Labour and Peter Obi, otherwise, we may end up raising the peoples hopes unnecessarily."

Today, many state governments are giving emerging salary raise to their workers. Some are sharing food packs, among many other methods being adopted to woo voters, all because of the fear of Labour Party.

Enyinnaya Abaribe, who was re-elected as senator for Abia Central district, while celebrating his victory said: "It

was a nice election and was going normally until we saw the OBIDATTI wave in the South-East and it almost consumed everybody and it showed me the love that our people have for me because I was able to survive that wave."

Meanwhile, Donatus Mathew,

popularly known as an 'Okada rider' won a seat in the Federal House of Representatives under the umbrella of the Labour Party (LP), for Kaura federal constituency of Kaduna State.

Matthew is from Kpak, Kagoro chiefdom in the Kaura Local Government Area of Kaduna State and was born in 1988.

He attended the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) Primary School in Kadarko, before he proceeded to Saint Jani Seminary School; however, he completed his secondary education at Teachers' College, Kagoro in Kaduna State.

He graduated from the Saint Albert Institute with a bachelor's degree in Philosophy.

Before being elected into the Federal House of Representatives, Matthew was once an Okada rider, a job he embraced for hard times and lack of employment.

Matthew began his political journey as a councillor where he acquired the intrigues of politicking against erroneous belief by many that he is a greenhorn to Nigerian politics.

He cut his political teeth as a councillor, having served as a supervisory councillor in his local government.

"Before I became a councillor, I was an Okada man. I have been using a bike to sustain myself and I am proud of that. That is my humble beginning," he said.

The father of four said he initially joined the Labour Party to work for the presidential candidate then. But later on, in the course of events, people urged him to go into the contest, which he said he reluctantly went into because he never intended to.

However, after due consultation, people insisted that I should come for service and that triggered my interest. That was the simple reason why I joined the contest. Also, we want to give people the credible leadership they expect, most especially my constituency.

He encouraged politicians with humble backgrounds not to look down on themselves.

"They should not allow distractions from other angles. Once they come into politics, they should just be real and people will assess them for who they are," he noted.

Matthew won the seat with 10,508 voters, followed by Gideon Lucas Gwani of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who polled 10,297 votes. The candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) got 9,919 votes to place third in the election.

Personality



Good governance: Maryam Shetty leading by empowering others

The notion of providing women with opportunities to invest and change their circumstances for the better seems to have defined the entrepreneurial journey of the Nigerian social activist Maryam Shettima so far.

Due to her remarkable commitment to patriotism, she was privileged to represent Nigeria at the United Nation General Assembly in the committee of Accountability and Transparency, and Anti-corruption.

“This makes me want to give my best and achieve positive changes in my community. My ambitions are built on determination and discipline, to become a social activist and make a difference in people’s lives.”

Maryam Shettima (famously known as Maryam Shetty) is a passionate advocate for good governance, which is hardly surprising considering that she is the founder of the ‘We Believe Movement’, an initiative she is using as a social campaign project designed to promote a national rebirth defined purely on viable ethos and active citizenship.

“#webelieve is an independent, non-governmental agency, that is committed to creating yardsticks for good governance and we have taken it upon ourselves to marshal a way forward for our great nation.

“Yet we are Nigerians and we believe! To ‘Believe’ is to hold a concept in this case in which we are totally committed,” she said.

Under the umbrella of



this movement is a deliberate ideology that places every Nigerian as Nigerian first before any other identity. The Nigerian of her dream is a Nigerian that isn’t defined by the trinity of ethnicity, religion and politics, but by the dreams of the country’s founding fathers. She is building a critical mass of Nigerians who are now disconnected from the apron of tribal

distrust, religious bigotry and parochial leanings.

She continues to lend her voice to peace building, quality leadership protection and participation of women and other minorities in the society through the impactful and popular #WeBelieve movement.

Maryam obtained her Masters Degree from East London University, Stratford in the United King-

dom where she majored in Sports Physiotherapy. She was on the medical team of the London Olympics where she worked with top-tier athletes including world record holder, Jamaica’s Usain Bolt.

Maryam is known for philanthropic initiatives especially in the area of education where she led the rehabilitation of schools in

her native state of Kano on the successful platform of #GivingBack initiative.

Maryam Shettima built a distinguished career in the field of physiotherapy and alongside being a social entrepreneur, in addition to her prominent role in the field of supporting women and expanding the circle of her participation in society, which made her one of the influential young leaders in Africa.

During her visit to the Presidential Villa at the behest of the Nigerian Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, Maryam Shetty, who was born into the ancient Kano Royal family and started her early education in Kano, echoed to the fascinating amazement of the vice president. “we are a congregation of young, passionate and independent-minded Nigerians, most of which are professionals with a flare to do things differently.

“And today, we are championing the course of anti-corruption and accountability, a course of moral consciousness in politics, a course of critical infrastructure and social services, and indeed we are championing the course of a new Nigeria,” she said with measured pride and confidence.

With her #WEBELIEVE MOVEMENT, Maryam Shetty is calling on the leadership of her home country to roll out a holistic and sustained people-centred development master plan and national project of human capacity development.

She wants a Nigeria

where Nigerian citizens can have the heart to emancipate the land from the backwardness of ethnicity, parochialism and religious bigotry, a Nigeria where citizens can believe in, live in and if possible die for. That the language of blame, cynicism and hopelessness should be replaced with a renewed philosophy of hard work, vigour and harmony, for great nations are made from the sacrifices of her people.

Politically, she participated as a member of the Presidential Campaign Team Field Operations. Youths and Women Presidential Campaign Team Member Strategic Communication, and saw through a commendably peaceful election Congress in Delta State as one of the seven committee members.

She played critical roles in the just concluded 2023 presidential election due to her vast network, as a member of the contact and mobilisation as well as contributing massively in the policy making and strategy committees respectively.

Maryam Shettima was awarded an Honorary Degree for her outstanding roles in Leadership and Community Development by the ESGT University of Technology, Benin Republic.

She continues to lend her voice to peace building, quality leadership protection and participation of women and other minorities in the society through the impactful and popular #WeBelieve movement.

State of the of Nation

NewsExtra

Guber poll: Umo Eno gains more grounds as APC, SDP factions collapse structures into PDP

ANIEFIOK UDONQUAK, Uyo

The governorship ambition of Umo Eno of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has continued to gain more grounds and acceptance with the factions of the All Progressive Congress (APC) as well as that of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) throwing their support behind him ahead of the governorship election scheduled for March 18.

The group under the umbrella of Truth Akwa Ibom registered their support during a visit to the governorship hopeful in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital.

The leader of the group, Sam Akpan, a former stalwart of the APC, said that they decided to walk away from their former political parties because they were convinced that the choice of Umo Eno to succeed Governor Udom Emmanuel would bring peace and development in the state.

According to him, "Today there is peace in Akwa Ibom, and Governor Udom Emmanuel has brought credibility in governance and government. He has diversified the economy of the state from a core civil service state to an enterprise-driven economy.

"These strides are very indicative of good things to come. Above all, he found favour with God to find somebody competent to bring decorum to governance, so we took the decision to return wholeheartedly to the PDP.

"We are all former members of the APC. This is only a small team of executive members. Among us today, are former State officers that won primaries and have decided to abandon the APC. We broken ranks completely and have all come under the PDP umbrella."

He further said, "We walked away because we are very convinced that the choice of Pastor Umo Eno would bring peace and growth. We are delighted that the party has received us with open arms.

Guber poll: APC youth leader urges Lagosians to vote for Sanwo-Olu

The All Progressives Congress (APC) national youth leader, Dayo Israel, has urged the residents of Lagos State to ensure the re-election of Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu for another term as reward for his outstanding performance since in 2019.

Israel made the appeal during his ongoing statewide door-to-door voter engagement exercise ahead of the election on Saturday, March 18.

As part of the engagement which involves direct conversations with voters and visitation to community hubs, the national youth leader has covered Badagry, Amuwo Odofin, Mushin, Alimosho, and Festac where he reeled out community-specific interventions and projects of the Lagos State Government under the leadership of Governor Sanwo-Olu.

In Ilesamaja Mushin where Israel's entourage of local mobilisers and community influencers was met by a throng of residents eager to hear his message, he highlighted some of the key projects started and completed by the Sanwo-Olu administration, including educational infrastructure such as classrooms and other amenities in St. Joseph Secondary School, Ajumoni Grammar School, Oduwa Junior Secondary School and others in the area.

"Today, we are coming to endorse what God has approved. Today, we have also come to bear witness that we, the executives that have fused ourselves into an organization have accepted Umo Eno.

"We have come to partner with you, give us the space and encourage us to follow you. We have decided to vote for the PDP. Today, we are called "truth", the other time, we were called the Akwa Ibom Peoples Forum (AKPF) and this Truth is larger and stronger than AKPF."

Akpan also disclosed that some executive and members of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), have merged with them to ensure that they deliver PDP for a better Akwa Ibom State.

"We also have another political party, SDP that has also joined us, they are also structured comprehensively across the state. So, we are partnering across board to achieve our set goal of voting massively for Umo Eno," he said.

Also speaking, Bassey Antai, a former commissioner in the state, said the choice of Umo Eno as candidate of PDP in the state has endeared so many to the PDP due to his strength of character, competence and capacity.

He therefore, assured that they were ready to mobilise for the success of the PDP in the state.

In his response, Umo Eno appreciated the group for the decision to support and vote for him and the PDP and assured everyone that his administration would be all-inclusive.

He expressed delight at the numerical strength and structure of the group, adding that it has become one of the foremost support groups firmly behind his candidacy.

The governorship hopeful said that successive administrations in the state, especially the Udom Emmanuel-led administration have made remarkable impact in the development of the state, and assured everyone that his focus would be on building on the achievements of the past leaders.

According to him, "Governor Babajide Sanwoolu has demonstrated his commitment to a Greater Lagos with outstanding cross-sectoral achievements that have helped Lagos retain its lead as one of the largest economies in Africa and the preferred destination for local and foreign investments," he said.

"Our children are learning in the best conditions in government-operated schools, civil servants are enjoying a new lease of life and unprecedented productivity levels, and residents are able to move around and conduct their business with greater ease because of the administration's commitment giant strides in expanding the means of mobility in Lagos and providing access to credit through agencies and initiatives like the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund."

"My appeal to the people of Lagos is for them to send a strong message that hard work and excellent performance matter by re-electing Governor Babajide Sanwoolu on Saturday to continue the many good works he has started."

Israel's grassroots campaign for Governor Sanwo-Olu's re-election follows his successful nationwide mobilisation for the APC and President-elect Bola Ahmed Tinubu in the just-concluded presidential election.

Igbo safety and Lagos politics

...Letter to an Onye-Igbo friend in Lagos

By Chinweizu

My dear CA, Kaa.

This letter is prompted by the situation in Lagos in this 2023 election period. Several factions among the Yoruba are fighting over power, and non-Yoruba voters, Igbos included, are having to decide how to use their votes.

My concern is that Igbos, for their safety, should stop making themselves pawns in the fight among Yoruba factions, and stop offering themselves to be sacrificed as scapegoats by any unhappy faction.

A few days ago I sent out my recommendation for circulation to Igbo voters in Lagos. You wrote me and strongly disagreed with my recommendation. I suggested we agree to disagree on this matter, but you came back with a more elaborate statement of your position.

I think our disagreement is rooted in our different perspectives, and in the different models we are using to understand the problem. May I therefore invite you to join me in an examination of the models behind our different recommendations?

Mine is that of aggression, and specifically of the Territorial Imperative and its penalties for intrusion. Yours, if I understand it correctly, is that of inter-spousal violence, i.e. domestic violence. If I am wrong, please correct me.

May I briefly explain mine? I think Igbo behavior in Lagos violates the Territorial Imperative, and therefore is biologically incorrect. And it is triggering the response that intrusion naturally provokes in territory-defending species. (Besides humans, the many animal species that defend territory include Foxes, Termites, Howling monkeys, Rats, and Lions)

Intrusion is a form of aggression; and in these species, intruders are usually driven back across the boundary. Or worse, are attacked, defeated and killed. Igbos in Lagos are behaving like intruders and are provoking the biologically correct response from those into whose territory they are intruding. And as they don't seem to like the response, the question is how they should get out alive from the dangerous situation in which they have put themselves by their behaving (even if unconsciously) like intruders.

Your perspective is based on the model that Igbos in Lagos are like a wife battered by her bully of a husband. But are Igbos the wife of the Yorubas? How so? By what logic or curious imagination is that even a plausible analogy? That's why I think your model is inappropriate and misleading. And like they say: If you don't understand it, you can't fix it. Hence any recommendation based on it can't solve a problem it misunderstands. A flood is not a forest fire, and any attempt to

use on a flood the measures that are appropriate for a forest fire, or vice versa, has little or no chance of success.



From the territorial imperative perspective, Igbos in Lagos are behaving like intruders, like aggressors. They may not be conscious of it, but they are doing so just the same. Until they become conscious of it, they can't understand the response they are provoking, and they can't save themselves from the biologically correct response to their territorial intrusion. If they dislike the response, all they need to do is cease and desist from their intrusive behavior and conduct themselves like good guests.

Let me give a historical perspective that shows that Igbo behavior in Lagos is also politically incorrect; especially given some of the reckless claims some of them make. How can Lagos be "No man's land" when Igbos met some people there when they first arrived? How can Lagos be "No man's land" when it was a Yoruba ruler, Obba Kosoko, who ceded Lagos to the British in 1861? That's decades before Igbos started arriving in Lagos. When and how did it subsequently become "No Man's land"?

Now, consider a man who goes from his village to another village and gets into a compound where he buys a piece of land in some corner and builds his house. Then he begins to ask to take part in the family meeting of the owners of the compound. He doesn't stop there. Claiming that the compound is "No man's land", he proceeds to demand to chair the family meeting of his hosts. Should he be surprised if the offended hosts attack and throw him out? How can the Igbo guests in Lagos insist on selecting the governor of Lagos? Isi odikwa ha mma? Is their head correct? The Naija version of democracy no go gree that kind of democracy-o! Niaja no be America where, with the indigenes

killed off, everybody is an immigrant and anybody can seek any office anywhere he lives in America. So Igbos need to come to their political senses if they want to live in safety in Lagos.

Furthermore, why is it the job of Igbos to rescue the Lagos Yorubas from the APC political machine they themselves created and that's now grinding everybody down? Why should Igbos sacrifice themselves for others? Why shouldn't Igbos look to their own safety first? Or is self-preservation no longer the first law of nature? You asked me to stop distributing my recommendation to the Igbos in Lagos. And I ask: Shouldn't every Onye-Igbo in Lagos get a chance to consider the option I suggested before deciding what to do on election day? And if not, why not?

Let Igbos not get carried away either by human rights rhetoric or by the illusion that Nigeria is already a mature democracy where alleged citizen rights are respected and enforced.

Here is an instructive story about rights: A driver of a VW beetle came to a crossroads. The traffic light showed green for him. But he saw an elephant about to cross in front of him. Instead of waiting for the elephant to cross, he insisted on his right of way and drove on. And the elephant put its foot on the car and crushed him inside it. He died maintaining his right of way. But what good did it do him? Hence the saying: Whatever the traffic light may say, the elephant has the right of way.

I hope this helps us understand our difference in this matter. If it doesn't, then let's agree to disagree, and rest the matter here.

Ya gazie.
Mma mma
Chinweizu

A Jolly Ride on Lagos Blue Line Transit



AYO OYOZE BAJE

Baje is Nigerian first food technologist in the media and author of 'Drumbeats of Democracy'

“Seeing is believing”, as the wise ones who truly know their onions state came to full effect for yours truly on March 8, 2023. That was when I honoured an invitation by the high-flying, Ayo Omotoso-led Association of Travels and Tourism Writers of Nigeria (ATTWON) to travel by rail, via the Blue Line from Marina to Mile 2 and back.

With the knowledge of the increasing need by Lagosians to travel by rail and water to ease the pressure off the ever-busy roads becoming an imperative, I gave a nod of approval. What an awesome and memorable experience it turned out to be!

As a self-confessed avid supporter of the Gov. Babajide Sanwo-Olu-led administration, characterized by people-oriented, futuristic projects with ample empirical evidences on ground to show the world, one had read much of such achievements in line with the THEMES Agenda. But getting to see some of those projects made much meaning. The taste of the pudding, as they say is in the eating.

The invitation was therefore, an opportunity to critically assess the import of the Blue Line rail project which came into effect and was celebrated in December, 2022. It was also an avenue to meet with great minds such as Mr. Gbenga Dauud, the President of Nigerian Hotels and Catering Institute (NHCI), Mr. Kolade Julius, Vice President (South-West) of Federation of Tourism Association of Nigeria (FTAN), Ms. A. Olayemi, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the Association of Civil Engineers of Nigeria and of course, Mr. Kolawole Ojelabi of the Ministry of Transportation, who graciously granted an illuminating interview on the Blue Line Rail project.

By the way, THEMES is an acronym for Saanwo-Olu's administration's six strategic development agenda namely, Traffic Management and Transportation, Health and Environment, Education and Technology, Making Lagos a 21st Century Economy, Entertainment and Tourism. That is in addition to Security and Governance.

“Mr. Governor, I want to say thank you for sticking to your promise to Lagosians that the infrastructure for the first phase of the Lagos Rail mass Transit Blue Line rail (Marina – Mile 2) would be completed in the last quarter of this year. Lagosians now trust you that you are a man of integrity, and that is why they have asked you to continue the good job in 2023 and beyond

Dr. Frederic Oladeinde (Commissioner for Transportation, Lagos State, December 21, 2022)

It is worth noting that the Lagos Rail Mass Transit (LRMT) Blue Line is a 27-kilometre railroad. In addition, it happens to be one of the six rail lines and one monorail, recommended for Lagos in the state's strategic Transport Master Plan (STMP). The salutary aim of course, is to cater to the ever-increasing public transport demand of the good people of Lagos, up till 2032.

Of interest, is that the Marina to Mile 2 rail, which I savoured happens to be the first phase of the massive project which was completed in December, 2022. The entire Blue Line is a 27-km rail road with 11 stations, but with five stations built so far. Structurally, it is located in the middle of the 10-lane Lagos Badagry Expressway from Okokomaiko to Iganmu. That is, before ascending on a rail bridge from Iganmu to Marina.

The second phase from Mile 2 to Okokomaiko will have stations at FESTAC Town, Alakija, Trade Fair, Volkswagen, LASU and of course, Okokomaiko. To achieve the lagoon level crossing for the rail tracks, they are elevated from Iganmu to Marina.

While over 400, 000 passengers are to be moved daily when the projected is fully completed, the first

phase has the capacity to move more than 200,000 passengers on daily basis and at a speed of 80 km/hr, with the trains projected to arrive at every station between 3-5 minutes. There is however, a head way of about 20 minutes. Six train sets, comprising of four cars each are to be deployed with three already up and running.

With regards to the source of electric power for the Blue Line it is through the Electric Multiple Units (EPU), powered using the third rail system. This is supplied from public power source which is a purpose-built Independent Power Project (IPP) and a UPS system.

On the critical issue of safety, the entire rail tracks have been securely fenced to deter any form of intrusion, or even crossing of the tracks by pedestrians. And at regular intervals the Blue Line corridors are equipped well-defined and well-built pedestrian bridges.

And on the weather fluctuation issues of storms and rainfall, there are provisions of drainages to prevent the tracks from being waterlogged.

To ease communication, there are audio and audiovisual communication systems installed at stations and on the train while the passengers have free access to WiFi.

Furthermore, there are daily schedules available on the LAMATA website including the cost of transportation, for those interested in travelling by rail. And payments are made using the Cowry card currently used on regulated bus and ferry services.

As Gov. Sanwo-Olu rightly noted, during the commissioning of the first phase back in December, 2022 it marks the milestone in development of LRMT. It is a strong testimony of the government's commitment to building on the legacies of past administrations, with special reference to that of Asiwaju Ahmed Tinubu. The governor described the moment as “historic”, saying Lagos became the first sub-national government in Africa to fund and deliver a rail system from the state's balance sheet.

He said construction of the second phase of the Blue Line rail project, which covers 14-kilometres from Mile 2 to Okokomaiko, will be launched immediately after completion and inauguration of the first phase in January.

On a personal note, I took note of the warm reception by virtually all the workers on ground; from those who provided the card and the information on the take-off to those who offered the light blue Cowry wrist band by which one could get the QR code with the mobile app to make payment.

It was one memorable experience for yours truly, who happens to be Aquarius by zodiac sign –with an abiding love for water resources and travelling by it. That the Sanwo-Olu –led administration has completed the long-delayed project almost two decades after it started, on the first phase of the Lagos Blue Rail Mass Transit (LRMT) is worthy of both commendation and emulation.

As Dr. Frederic Oladeinde, the Commissioner for Transportation, Lagos state rightly stated during that commissioning ceremony, Sanwo-Olu promised and has kept to his words. He has therefore, exhibited Trust as the key element of the leadership principle between their pilots and the led majority.

In addition to other sterling achievements in several sectors that makes him eminently qualified to get his Second Term from the good people of the Centre of Excellence.



IKEDDY ISIGUZO

Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues

Nigeria 2023: International community tired of our shamelessness

established?

Agreed, machines could mal-function at anytime. Could that also explain the thumb-printing of ballot papers to favour certain candidates? Was that why the machines failed?

Police and other security agencies drew billions of possibly borrowed funds to amass at the polling units and did nothing about the intimidations that their presence was to stop.

Common criminals that should have been arrested on the spot and prosecuted were being begged not to execute their threats, chiefly, that anyone who did not vote for a certain candidate would not be allowed to vote. No arrests were made on that ground.

Others pulled the processes to a halt by not following procedures that marred the outcomes, the results and turned up mutilated papers as results sheets. Some results were cancelled, written all over that those important documents looked like scribbles from earliest years of kindergarten. We can explain them.

At the apex of different formations of the heists that the elections became were some of our best professors in various fields. We must acknowledge the few who resisted being part of the destruction of our country.

Professors are the leaders of our academic institutions that produce the youth who we claim are the leaders of tomorrow. A blighted tomorrow it seems.

These professors would return to their schools and possibly be chairs of committees against examination mal-practices. Is election rigging not a mal-practice?

Many are crawling out of their refugee to state that they were frightened into cooking up figures or they could have died. There

are suspicions that many of the officials were compromised to either manufacture the results or look away during infractions.

The guilty are many. They include those in post haste arrangements to suggest that nothing can be done about the election. They say the election were past and the President-elect was already being congratulated.

No seems concerned about the complaints that would compound the next elections if they are addressed. These problems are Nigerian. It would be up to Nigerians to solve.

These elections have worsened the trust deficit of governments, individuals, and institutions that again abused, breached and battered the trust people had that things could be different this time.

Yes, things were different; only that they were worse. The danger in words is that we presume that “different” could be only “good” in the hands of those managing a situation.

We should manage our situations which we created. If we are waiting for international organisations to intervene, they would not so long as our crude oil which so delights them that they named it sweet crude, is delivered promptly and at their fixed price.

Prayers are being offered for judges to reach the “right” decision, being that the election was rigged and could not stand. Our belief is that only prayers can stop the judges from not acting “wrongly”.

Will witnesses succumb to threats? In what shape will Nigeria survive the latest assault? There are no full answers.

Organised crimes like election rigging - in all their forms - would continue to thrive so long as they are not identified properly

and dealt with for what they are. When we praise criminals as strategists, applaud their expertise and recommend it to others, what type of country do we want?

There is work to do to rescue our country from the perpetual opprobrium of election rigging. We cannot be famed for rigging elections.

Finally...

SIR Friday Nwanzoie Nwosu, my kinsman, brother, friend, APC's National Welfare Secretary, a man who drapes his ways with fear of the Almighty, simplicity, a brilliant mind who makes no noise about his victories as a lawyer, passed on Thursday. He was a great Ngwa man who made his points quietly, contested twice for tickets to run for governorship of Abia State in two different parties. He was denied on both instances. I hope as I write this it helps me to accept he is gone, the first step in my healing. My condolences to his family and associates. May the Almighty rest FN.

DEATH called again at Sogunle, a rail-crossing in Ikeja, Lagos, killing an unconfirmed number of people, months after a train crush a lady to death at a rail crossing in Abuja. Vehicles running into trains has been a feature of that crossing for over 10 years. In their haste, the vehicles are easily trapped by the magnetic field that a train generates as it moves. There used to be rail police whose duty included blowing the alerts to keep traffic off rail tracks. These accidents should be stopped. More education on the working of trains and the Rail Police properly managing rail crossings, would save lives.

Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues