

Fuel price hike: How Lagos residents are coping with hardship – Daily Times investigation

...Burglary, begging soar, lavish celebrations dip

CHUKWUEMEKE IWELUNMO

The present economic predicament imposed on the country following the increase in pump price of petrol

has compelled many Nigerians in Nigeria's commercial capital to severely adjust their style of living in the face of the realities on ground, Daily Times investigation showed. This is underscored by hard

facts which show that the country's annual inflation rate has accelerated for a sixth month running, to 22.79 per cent as of June, 2023 – the highest since September, 2005 – as against earlier forecasts

of 22.9 per cent.

The biggest upward swing came in the cost of food and non-alcoholic beverages (25.3% against 24.8% in May).

Sorely affected are such foods as oil and fat, bread and cereals, fish, potatoes, yams, fruits, meat,

vegetable, milk, cheese.

Compared to the previous month, the consumer price index (CPI) soared 2.1 per cent, the highest since May, 2016.

These apparent indicators that

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The Daily Times

THE NIGERIA DAILY NEWSPAPER OF RECORDS SINCE 1926

WWW.dailytimesng.com

Monday, July 24, 2023 Vol. 4 No. 2,017

www.dailytimesng.com

DailyTimesNGR

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N200

STATE OF FEDERAL ROADS

Gov spits fire on FG

TITUS AKHIGBE,
BENIN

Governor Godwin Obaseki of Edo State has come down hard on the Federal Government (FG) over the deplorable condition of the latter's roads in the South-South State, alleging that it appeared FG was not interested in immediately putting the highways back to shape and yet would not

let the State do so and hand it (FG) the bills.

He did not say why the FG would decide to take such course.

But, the Governor counted the huge cost of FG's seeming inaction, refusal or unwillingness to work the roads, pointing to heavy loss of human lives, economic waste, financial losses to businesses that depend on the roads, and other negative outcomes.

He said, for instance, the State

government cannot intervene to fix the deplorable Benin-Auchi and Benin-Sapele Roads because the FG said it has already awarded contracts for the repair of the highways.

Obaseki disclosed these to journalists after the monthly Security Council meeting held in Government House, Benin City, the state capital.

The Governor said that much as Edo State is a transportation hub, it

is concerned that the major federal road network in the state, which connects several parts of the country, is in bad condition.

He noted that his administration has done everything in its power to appeal to the FG to look into the repair of the wide span of damaged federal roads in the State, to no avail.

Obaseki added that his administration has drawn FG's attention to the failed portions of Benin-Au-

chi Road, Benin-Sapele Road and the Benin-Lagos Road, particularly the Ovia River Bridge, alleging that nothing has been done yet.

According to him, "Look at the incident that happened in Ovia River Bridge three weeks ago, in which we lost several lives following multiple accidents. Nothing has been done till now. This shows they don't care about us in the State."

"The issue on the Benin-Lagos

CONTINUES ON P4 →



Flooded Olodo Bridge-Iwo Road, Ibadan, Oyo State after the downpour...on Sunday.

Pension fund assets may hit N19trn next year

...Retirees blow hot

MOTOLANI OSENI

Considering the current speed of growth of the nation's pension fund assets, there are indications that they may rise to N19 trillion by next year – barely six months from now.

Leading credit rating company, Agosto & Co, in its pension industry report, over the weekend, projected a 13 per cent year-on-year growth in the pension industry's Assets Under Management (AuM), pro-

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Governors may divert palliatives – former senator

STEPHEN GBADAMOSI,
IBADAN

Former senator who represented Kaduna Central, Sen. Shehu Sani, at the weekend raised the alarm that some State Governors may divert funds meant for palliatives.

The prominent socio-political commentator insisted that those

Governors who are owing workers' salaries, failed to pay contractors or have domestic debt overhang were at risk of dipping their hands into the funds to provide palliatives for the suffering masses, to settle these issues.

Some might even dispense the funds to take care of their political supporters, he alleged.

Sani backed Governor Charles Soludo of Anambra State on the

skepticism on the distribution of palliatives to Nigerians over the hardship caused by the removal of fuel subsidy by President Bola Tinubu at the end of May this year.

In a tweet, Sen. Sani urged the Federal Government to ensure proper checks on the palliative funds.

Tweeting, Sani wrote: "Without proper check, some states will use palliative funds to pay contractors

they are owing or pay the inherited backlog of salaries and pensions or use it to settle their domestic debts with banks or use it settle political supporters; Soludo is right, all states are not equal."

Last Thursday, Governor Soludo, speaking to newsmen in Abuja after a meeting of the National Economic Council (NEC), a body to which all Governors are members, had urged Governors to prune

down on their use of funds amid the hardship Nigerians were facing following the fuel subsidy removal.

Soludo had stated that the priorities of State Governors are different, from state to state.

According to him, not all will be able to pay the N8000 cash transfer when they receive the palliative funds because some have huge debts to pay and so would most likely deploy the funds to same.

He had said, in part: "For ex-

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Heavens won't fall when you're removed as President, Atiku replies Tinubu P.5

Fuel price hike: How Lagos residents are coping with hardship –Daily Times investigation

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the country's economic situation has grown from bad to worse have also seen many Nigerians twist and turn to cope with the significant impacts of the fuel subsidy removal, petrol price dramatic jump, unification of the foreign exchange rates, and other economic markers.

Daily Times, which monitored business activities, discovered that, for instance, in Lagos, the usual heavy traffic on the busy roads of the nation's commercial capital, has petered out.

It was gathered that many Lagos residents who own three or more cars now board commercial vehicles to their various destinations, citing inability to fuel their cars at the current cost of about N650 per litre.

A resident, Tony Ikenna, who lives in Surulere, told *Daily Times*: "Among my cars, I own a Range Rover Sport. The tank capacity is 244 litres. How much petrol do you think will do to fill the tank, or even half-fill it? O jare, I've parked it at home and taken taxi to wherever I'm going. More affordable for me that way," he remarked.

Further investigations revealed that transportation fares in the state have soared significantly.

For example, transportation from Egbeda area of Lagos State to the popular Oshodi, which usually went for N300 prior to the fuel price hike, now attracts between N600 and N700 depending on the traffic situation.

Also, from Sango toll gate to Oshodi now attracts

N1000 as against the usual fare of N400.

Commercial bus operators blamed the hike on the recent increase in the pump price of petrol.

Lamenting the development, a commercial bus driver who plies Iyana Ipaja to Ikotun and charges N300 on the popular 'korope' bus, and who identified himself simply as Tijjani, said he is finding it difficult from his daily returns to even recover fuel money, since the advent of the new fuel regime.

"What can I do? Despite this crisis, I still can't afford to remain at home idle. Because if I do, what would my wife and the kids eat?"; he queried.

Our correspondent observed that some residents who cannot afford the new fares resorted to trekking in order to reduce cost of transportation. Some said the situation has now offered them "a golden opportunity" to exercise their body, especially the heart so that "we can live longer than our traducers."

Cost of food items has also gone up astronomically, with some families compelled to adjust their culinary habits.

A bag of rice which sold for between N28,000 and N30,000 now costs between N38,000 and N40,000 while a paint container size of garri now costs N1,500 as against N1000.

It was also observed that social activities, especially lavish celebrations, have reduced as a result of the economic situation.

Checks also showed that the number of beggars on

the streets of Lagos has increased as the economic situation takes its toll on the vulnerable. The harsh circumstances have also seen many low-paid workers turn to 'corporate beggars' as their take-home pay is no longer sustainable. This

class is very visible on Lagos Island, Oshodi, Ketu, Ikeja and other parts of Lagos where residents converge on for one business or the other.

The economic situation in the land has also led to increase in burglary of

shops in some areas in Alimosho, with shop owners crying out on a daily basis. Statistics showed that over five shops are reportedly burgled, and goods carted away at Gowon Estate, Egbeda area of the state, almost daily.

A labour leader, Comrade Abdulrasaq Saidu, called on the Federal Government to, as a matter of urgency, address the current economic predicament in the country by fixing the refineries.



Troops of 63 Brigade operating under 6 Division Nigerian Army invades and destroyed an IPOB/ ESN enclave in a forested high ground in Asaba...at the weekend. Photo: NA.

FUOYE refutes allegation of obnoxious fees

BY OUR REPORTER

Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE) has refuted allegations that it asked students to pay obnoxious fees, said to have been tagged Final Year Brothers (FYB) and Staff Fees.

The university said such could "only either exist in the imagination of the students making such allegations or he or she is using the falsehood to dupe his or her parents."

A statement issued at the weekend by Wole Balogun, Special Assistant (SA), Media, to the Vice Chancellor, which disclosed these, quoted the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC), Administration, Professor Tajudeen Bolanle Poola, as saying that the management merely instructed final year students to bind the hard copies of their projects

at the university printing press.

Prof. Poola said: "This was done in good faith so as to ensure that the projects of these graduating students have quality that will ensure the test of time and meet up with the uniformity in colours which vary from faculty to faculty."

He added: "First of all, our great University places high premium on quality and standard. This is why we offer the best for our students in terms of infrastructure, lectures and community services. FUOYE has noticed over the time that the binding of the projects of most of our graduating students done outside are of very poor quality and do not match the official faculty colours. Their poor quality cannot make these works last long on the shelves.

"This is why the Management thought it wise

and much better for these students to bind at our University press and this explains why we instructed them to bring the projects for binding at the University press where quality works will be done for them.

"Students' final year projects are research goldmines which should be well kept and made durable and this is highly beneficial to the students, the University and more importantly, the society at large."

Dismissing the allegations that students were asked to pay such obnoxious fees as FYB fee and staff fee, the DVC said: "FUOYE Management never asked students to pay for FYB. We should also note that students' departmental associations are in all Universities and whatever they mutually agreed to do for them-

selves as part of their social life on campus is, first of all, their own decisions not management's.

"On project issue, only binding of students' projects are to be done with University Press to allow for standard and uniformity in the Faculties' colours which vary from faculty to faculty.

"Thirdly, we challenge any member of the public to provide proofs on payment of staff fees as there is nothing of such here in FUOYE because the management never asked for such.

"However, it is possible that any student may want to use the University's name to dupe his or her parents. We therefore warn any writer from any news platform to get prepared for possible litigation for not balancing his findings before dragging the University's name in the mud on the social media."

Governors may divert palliatives –former senator

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ample, if you have a state that has been owing salary arrears, workers have been owed for three years, or for four years. The priority now is to even start paying some of the salary arrears or where pensioners have been owed their pension and gratuity for seven years, for example, the priority now might be to use part of the surplus to pay them.

"Then, there are also states that are with bumper harvests and that will say 'you know what, I want to deploy a chunk of this to implementing cash transfer and several of the other immediate programs' and that's why we couched this point, that this is ultimately still a federation. And the various States and Local Governments and Federal Government are at different levels in terms of their fiscal space and fiscal capacity. So, States, Local Government, Federal Government,

depending on the resource if the Federal Government, decides to do the same cash transfers.

"For example, we are recommending that they should do so using the framework of the States and Local Government that are nearer to the people, so to speak. That's basically that. We didn't sit down there to begin to say, 'oh, okay, this one your transfer will be'... like what is being banded around in the media, whether it's 8000 or 10,000, or 1000, or whatever. It will depend on what the state... if the state can afford it, and what they can afford. And I guess this is very important that we communicate this clearly."

Soludo, however, cautioned governors against being insensitive to the plight of Nigerians. He said it would be insensitive for Governors to have long convoys while residents of the state were reeling in hardship.

Niger creates 8 new ministries, posts 40 Perm Secs

SAKA BOLAJI
MINNA

Niger State Governor Mohammed Umar Bago has created eight new ministries and approved the posting of 40 Permanent Secretaries.

In a statement from the Office of the State Head of Service (HOS), Abubakar Yahaya Salisu, dated July

17 the Governor also approved the appointment of five new Permanent Secretaries.

The new ministries, according to the statement, include the Ministry of Secondary and Tertiary Health, Ministry of Communication Technology and Digital Economy, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and Ministry of Homeland Security.

Others are Ministry of Power and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management and Ministry of Housing and Urban Renewal.

Also the newly appointed Permanent Secretaries are Umar Zukogi, who was posted to Ministry of Housing and Rural Development; Aishatu Yelwa

Nuhu – Information and Strategy; Dr Matthew Ahmed – Livestock and Fishery; Barrister Mairo Mann- Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management; while former Commissioner of Health, Dr Mohammed Makusidi returned to the civil service as Permanent Secretary, Special Duties, in the Office of the Secretary to the State Government (SSG).

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Gov spits fire on FG

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Road, particularly the Ovia River Crossing, is becoming catastrophic. We have lost a lot of lives and done everything to get the Federal Government and the Federal Ministry of Works to work with us and put in place a palliative measure to stop the carnage on that road."

On Sapele Road, he said: "I was on Sapele Road recently. After the heavy downpour, the road was impassable. What is going on in Benin-Sapele Road is scandalous. I don't think that any region where the oil resources that sustain the country come from should be neglected. We have done everything possible. We don't know what to do again to draw the attention of the Federal Government to these roads."

Turning to other federal highways in the State, the Gov. said: "The Auchi-Ibillo Road was so bad that some of our contractors couldn't go to their quarry site. We

appealed to the Federal Government to do palliative work on that road, but they refused, saying the road is under contract. If I want to do the same to Benin-Sapele Road, I am not allowed to do so. They claim the road has been given out to a contractor.

"Last year, the Benin-Auchi Road was locked for about two weeks as food, animals, petroleum products could not reach their destination. We don't want such situations this year, so they should help us. We are not here to criticize them but to appeal for help."

The Governor noted that the FG's policy relating to these roads is very confusing, noting that in the past, States could rehabilitate federal roads and hand the bills to the FG, regretting that, that is no longer obtainable.

"At a point they said we can apply and take over the repair of federal roads, but I am yet to see a state they have given federal roads to fix," he noted.

New Islamic year: Etsu Nupe calls for sustained prayers for peace, unity

SAKA BOLAJI
MINNA

Etsu Nupe and Chairman, Niger State Council of Traditional Rulers, Alhaji Yahaya Abubakar has called on Muslim faithful to remain prayerful for the sustenance of peace, unity and progress of the country.

The Etsu made the call at his Wadata Palace, Bida, in a goodwill message to Muslim Ummah on the occasion of the new Islamic year (Muharram) 1445.

The royal father noted that the Islamic event was remarkable and reinvigorated the virtues of faith, sacrifice, obedience, love, tolerance, charity and peaceful co-existence, which were the deeds and teachings of Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

According to Etsu Nupe, the first of Muharram heralded the migration of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from his birthplace, Mecca, in search of a peaceful and conducive atmosphere to practice Islam. He said the day was when Prophet Muhammad did Hijrah from Mecca to Madina, his mother's hometown, to peacefully practise Islam.

"This brings to mind the need for everyone to imbibe the lessons of patience, perseverance, tolerance, moderation and compassion," Alhaji Abubakar said.

The traditional ruler congratulated Muslim faithful on the occasion of another lunar calendar, Hijrah 1445, and urged everyone to reflect on the purpose of the day, in the hope that mankind will

be guided by its lessons and significance in their daily living and interactions with others.

He called for "religious tolerance, mutual respect, and compassion for everyone, irrespective of their beliefs."

The leading traditional ruler, therefore, stressed that Nigerians' collective faith in God and sustained prayers for peace, unity and progress of the country, remained the ultimate goal for the full realisation of the nation's founding fathers' dreams and aspirations.

He said sustained prayers would enable the nation to overcome the devilish acts threatening its peaceful co-existence.

Alhaji Abubakar said the two major religions in the country preached peace and unity, and as such, Nigerians should adhere and focus on how to go closer to God instead of fomenting trouble.

"Let us revive the teachings of the prophet by preaching peace wherever we find ourselves," he said, adding that all sincere Muslims "are supposed to follow all that the Prophet of Islam preaches and teaches."

"Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) preached peace, love and unity and as true followers of Islam, we should emulate the same thing so that we can enjoy blessings of God Almighty here and in the hereafter," he admonished them.

Abubakar urged Nigerians to continue to be tolerant and live in peace with one another, irrespective of religious, cultural and ethnic differences.



Lagos State Taskforce led by its Chairman, CSP Shola Jejeloye, on Sunday, cleared the railway corridor on the Agege axis of the Metropolis of traders. Photo: Twitter | Mr. JAGs.

Lokpobiri floors Ekerefe, others to emerge Ijaw youth leader

AMOS OKIOMA,
YENAGOA.

Sir Jonathan Lokpobiri has emerged president of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) Worldwide in a keenly contested election held at the Gabriel Okara Cultural Centre, Yenagoa, amidst tight security.

According to the report obtained from the election, Sir Lokpobiri got 47 votes, while the immediate past IYC spokesperson Ebilade Ekerefe got 14 votes, as Benjamin Appah got 15 votes, Wisdom Ikuli, 3, Sobai Bulou-

bo, 2 and Eldred Pongonyo had 26 votes.

Speaking to journalists after the election, the 19th IYC president-elect an elated Sir Lokpobiri said he dedicated the victory "to God Almighty, the One Who gives power," and to all Ijaw youths worldwide.

"I am immensely grateful to everybody," he said.

In separate interviews, a participant in the election, Raymond Oruebi said; "I pray you bring that positive change we beg for in the IYC struggle."

He described Lokpobiri

as a man with "traces good leadership, competence, commitment and character and an exemplary and visionary leader who has over the years been known for his dogged commitment to the IYC ideals and his passion for making a positive impact on the lives of people."

Also speaking, another participant, Bekeakpo Frank, described him as "a star leader, a person who is seen as an exemplary leader and a policy maker, whose actions and decisions are regarded as best practic-

es worthy of emulation by others."

On his part, Douyi Tonworimi posited that the victory of Lokpobiri reflected the current mood of IYC to do away with those whose stock-in-trade is to subvert the will of the people and promote electoral violence.

He therefore urged him to be magnanimous in victory and work towards ushering a culture of tolerance and promotion of peace in order to unite all Ijaws irrespective of their religious and political affiliations.

Rep calls for early response to mitigate flood

TOM GARBA,
YOLA

Member representing Demsa/Numan/Lamurde in the National Assembly, Rep Kwamoti Bitrus Laori has called on agencies like National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to mitigate the possibility of flood disaster through prompt response.

Laori, who made the call while raising an issue of urgent public importance on the floor of the House of Representatives, said NEMA, in collaboration with other relevant agencies of government, has to flag off sensitization of flood-prone communities across Nigeria on the need for early warning and preparedness in response to possible flood disaster.

Laori said sensitization as early warning signal must be matched with early response "and what this means is that communities at risk must be empowered with timely information, equipped with skills and resources that give com-

munities needed capacity for preparedness towards mitigation and response before the disaster occurs and recovery thereafter."

He added: "Recall that the Seasonal Climate Prediction (SCP) and Annual Flood Outlook (AFO) released by the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NIMET) and the Nigerian Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA) at the beginning of the year 2023 both forecasted early onset of rainfall and high probability of flooding across the nation especially in states along the Benue and Niger trough;

"Aware of the horrific experience of 2022, when Nigeria witnessed the worst flood disaster in recent history; which according to NEMA claimed over 603 lives, displaced over 1.4 million people, injured over 2,400 people, destroyed about 82,035 houses and well over 332,327 hectares of farmlands across the country;

"The property losses were estimated to cost trillions of Naira; which further exacerbated the level of poverty

and food insecurity in the country. Similar predictions and warnings given at that time were not taken seriously, as is the case today.

"Concerned that in the third week of June or less than two weeks ago, some parts of Nasarawa – Demsa in Demsa Local Government Area and Sabon-Pegi in Numan Local Government Area were flooded, due to the heavy downpour that affected many homes and destroyed property worth millions of Naira. The flood also caused a washout of a box culvert in Gani-Gaku, along Numan -Yola Road. Note that this is coming earlier than onset of rainfall predicted in the region.

"Further concerned that as credible and timely as these predictions of flood disaster have proven over the years, flooding has become an annual recurring huge human and material costs in addition to the population displacement that comes with it as well as the health consequences on children and other vulnerable groups due to exposure

to diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, acute respiratory infections, measles, typhoid fever, meningitis, viral hepatitis, and mental health challenges.

"NEMA and other relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies should be mobilized and funded to prepare adequate logistics needed for distribution of relief to victims at the earliest occurrence of the impending disaster to mitigate its impact on Nigerian population already in distress as a result of the recent removal of subsidy on petroleum products.

"Accordingly resolves to:

urge the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, National Emergency Management Agency, National Commission for Refugees, Migration and the Internally Displaced Persons, to adequately prepare an effective response plan towards the imminent disaster by stockpiling relief materials at strategic locations to palliate the suffering of the victims in good time.

Pension fund assets may hit N19trn next year

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elling the total pension assets to an impressive N19 trillion by the end of next year.

It envisions that this growth will be supported by an anticipated increase in rates on fixed-income securities, specifically bank placements and a continued upswing in the stock market, adding that it is optimistic that the current rally in the equities market, marked by an impressive 27.37 per cent surge in the NGX All-Share Index (ASI) in the past one year, underpinned by the raft of reforms ushered in by the President Bola Tinubu government, will be sustained in the near term.

Given the NGX's bullish stance in the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE), the firm expects Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs) to realign their investment portfolios to capitalize on favourable market conditions, which could potentially amplify investment returns in the near to medium term.

Furthermore, Agosto & Co. firmly believes that the steady rise in contributions will be driven by robust regulatory oversight and increasing awareness of the micro pension scheme.

"However, it is critical to recognize that increased emigration, job losses, and rising inflation may pose a significant risk to our projections. These factors have the potential to impede pension asset growth by delivering negative real returns on investments," Agustin & Co noted.

Disclosing that Nigeria has the second-largest pension industry in Africa with AuM of N16.1 trillion (\$34.9 billion) as of May 31, 2023, representing a 13.5 per cent increase from the corresponding period in the prior year, the report added that this growth was primarily fueled by robust investment returns and, to a lesser extent, by additional contributions, mirroring the patterns observed in other well-established pension markets.

It stated that the industry witnessed a notable increase in the number of new contributors, surpassing 300,000 individuals. As a result, the total membership of the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) reached 9.9 million Retirement Savings Account (RSA) enrollees as of May 31, 2023, reflecting a three per cent growth compared to the correspond-

ing period.

The upswing in the number of enrollees, it said, can be attributed to the commendable rise in compliance levels across both the private and public sectors, coupled with the intensified marketing activities undertaken by pension fund administrators (PFAs).

"A significant informal sector (estimated at 65% of GDP), an elevated inflation rate of 22.41 per cent, a high poverty rate of 40 per cent, and restricted investment options afforded by the Nigerian capital market, continue to restrain the expansion of the industry. Particularly, the real value of pension assets continues to shrink as the real return on 364-day Treasury Bills remains firmly in negative territory (averaging -13.3% so far in 2023)," it pointed out.

However, two retirees have criticized the trend where PFAs continue to stack up pensioners' deposits but make the latter "pass throw hell" to access monies which they freely and voluntarily agreed to be deducted from their salaries and deposited in their RSAs while they were in service.

Mr. Michael Afolayan, who retired last year, said he has not been paid his pension yet. He blamed the situation on cumbersome processes put in place by his PFA for contributors to access their "hard-earned money."

"When they were collecting our deductions, it was so sweet for them to collect, hold and invest. Now, give me my money which you have been holding for me for decades, has become a huge ask," he lamented.

Afolayan called for a situation where prospective retirees can automatically collect 70 per cent of their contributions three months to the day of retirement, saying "this will make retirement very sweet for workers and reduce the number of deaths due to delay in payment of pension to retirees. Let us make life easy for people in this country."

"Can anyone owe National Assembly members as they leave office or those who work in the Presidential Villa for long like this? Are we not all Nigerians?"

On her part, Madam Chinwe Nwosu, who said she retired from the Federal Ministry of Education, said she is angry that a year-and-a-half after retiring, she is yet to be paid her benefits

which she put at about N12 million.

Nwosu blamed her PFA for tardiness in processing her emoluments, echoing Afolayan's view

that speedy collection of deposits should be marched with speedy payment to beneficiaries.

"PFAs collect our money and stockpile them,

running into mind-boggling sums, but when it comes to payment, they are not in a hurry to pay us. When next I go to my PFA, I will raise hell that day. Nobody will work

that day. Let them pay me my money and let there be peace. It has got to that stage, N12 million right now, to me, is a life-changer. N12million is not N12,000!"



Hauwa Bello, Head Public Sector, Stanbic IBTC Bank (left) and Director General, SMEDAN, Olawale Fasanya, during the MOU signing ceremony in Abuja...at the weekend.

Heavens won't fall when you're removed as President, Atiku replies Tinubu

ANDREW OROLUA, ABUJA.

Presidential candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the February 25 general elections, Abubakar Atiku, has pleaded with the Presidential Election Petition Court (PEPC) to summon enough courage to do substantial justice to his petition seeking the nullification of Ahmed Bola Tinubu as winner of the election.

Abubakar, who is more popularly known by his first name Atiku, pointedly said that contrary to Tinubu's threat there will be anarchy should he be removed, heavens would not fall when he (Tinubu) is sacked by the Court as Nigeria's president on account of alleged massive electoral fraud that brought him to office.

In his final written address, Atiku dismissed Tinubu's threat as an empty one deployed to scare the Court from upholding justice in the petition challenging Tinubu's election.

In the address settled by his lead counsel, Chief Chris Uche (SAN), the former Vice President recalled the courageous position of the Supreme Court in the case of Rotimi Amaechi, where the apex court held that heavens would not fall when justice is done in the manner prescribed by law.

Justice George Adesola Oguntade, who delivered



the Supreme Court judgment in the cited matter, had said: "I must do justice even if the heavens fall. The truth, of course, is that when justice has been done, the heavens stay in one place and in peace."

Atiku asked the PEPC to invoke the courage displayed in the past Supreme Court judgment to settle his petition against Tinubu by disregarding the threat of monumental chaos issued by Tinubu allegedly to

shield himself from justice.

The former Vice President maintained that Tinubu had lost the moral and legal rights to be in office as the country's President, having admitted a punitive forfeiture of \$US406,000 in a narcotics and money laundering-related affair.

Besides, Atiku accused the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of manipulating the results of the presidential election in the most corrupt

manner in favour of Tinubu and thereafter, unlawfully proclaiming him (Tinubu) winner of the election.

Citing the brazen subversion of the popular will of voters by INEC in favour of Tinubu, the former Vice President appealed that the proclamation of the electoral body be voided and set aside and, in its place, declare him winner of the election having convincingly scored majority of the lawful votes.

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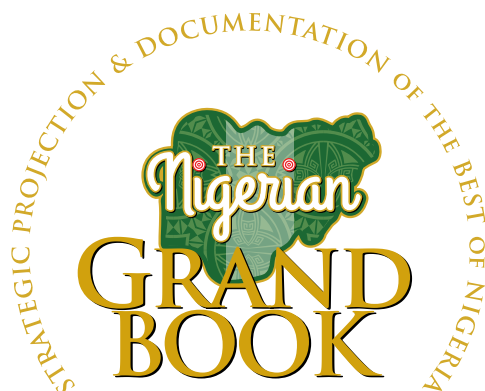
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The high cost of education in Nigeria

BY UCHE NWORAH, Ph.D

I did my primary school at Umuagbai Primary School, located along Obohia road in Aba. After the common entrance examinations, I was posted to Umuagbai Secondary School, located along Port Harcourt Road for my secondary education. I remember crying my eyes out over this posting. From Umuagbai to Umuagbai, I wondered.

I was very disappointed as I had wanted to be posted to National High School (Ibo National), Ngwa High School, Comprehensive Secondary School, Sacred Heart Eziana (SAHACO) or any other secondary school in Aba with boarding facilities.

I had to endure one year at Umuagbai Secondary School as a day student, but by my second year, my late father, Nkaonadi, granted my wish and secured transfer for me to far away College of Immaculate Conception (C.I.C) Enugu. A prestigious college and one of the best in the South-East region at

the time. I would later secure admission to the University of Cross River state (UNICROSS), Uyo, for undergraduate studies.

Graciously, by our second year, the military converted the university to a federal university and changed its name to University of Uyo, thus the tuition fees burden became less on my parents.

This post is not really about life as a day student or as a boarding student, the pros and cons, that is story for another day. This post is about what parents have to endure these days to put their children through primary, secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria.

Back in our day, payment of school fees was never a problem for our parents, especially in public schools and federal universities. Most of us attended public schools and universities. I can't remember or think of any private primary, secondary or tertiary school during our schooling years in the 80s and 90s.

Due to poor funding and other noted issues, the quality of education in Nigeria has

progressively deteriorated since then, leading to private primary and secondary schools and universities springing up all over. These private schools charge parents exorbitant school fees. Many charge millions of naira annually.

Unfortunately, it appears that the few remaining good public schools have caught up with the bug to charge parents an arm and a leg as school fees. The recent fees increase totaling N100,000 by Federal Government Unity Colleges is really unfortunate. Likewise the fees increase at the University of Lagos. How many families can afford those in today's Nigeria? Imagine a family with two or more children in secondary schools and universities. How will they cope?

In Nigeria, we like to benchmark our processes with Western societies but that clearly has not happened in these two cases. Public education is compulsory and free in most Western societies, especially at the primary and secondary school levels. If you wish your children to attend private



schools, that becomes an option hence the high fees the private schools charge abroad. At least, their governments have provided state schools which they fund adequately.

There has to be something the government should do for the people. Free public education funded with tax payers' money is

one of them. At the university level, the fees should be moderate and affordable. Although the Federal Government plans to set up students loan arrangements, that has not happened yet. I am afraid that with these increases, state-owned schools and universities may soon follow suit. I really feel for parents.

Nigerians are happy slaves and mere cowards

BY DOMINIC KIDZU

Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed".

- Mahatma Gandhi

Nigeria is not only the most populous black nation in the world, it is also the country with the highest number of cowards in the universe. If the country has 200,000,000 citizens, over 199,000,000 million of them are effemi-nate, groveling, church-and mosque-going cowards, who cannot stand up for themselves or even pursue an argument in pursuit of their own self-interest.

They only complain, wring

and throw their hands in the air and wait for the Almighty God to come down and save them, like Vladimir and Estragon in Bethold Bretch's 'Waiting For Godot'.

If Nigerians were only cowardly, they probably could have been excused; after all, not everyone is going to be a hero, but they are also very idiotic and damn right stupid. Adapting to unnecessary suffering like bedbugs to hot water.

From the North to the South, and from the East to the West, the people are all willing slaves and beasts of burden, ready to adapt to every degree of inhumanity they are subjected to as long as they are going to be allowed to swallow a morsel of cheap food and to go to bed in the night, even without light or

comfort.

The people can put up with any amount of shit. Cooked, fried, boiled, roasted and dried in the sun. Shit poured over their heads or stuffed into their mouths and noses without a whimper. That is how quiescent and pliable they are, easily led to the slaughter without a bleat or a whimper.

The people cannot stand up for themselves or ask questions of their leaders or say 'no, this is enough', because they are not a thinking people and certainly not an acting lot. Just donkeys in stress-stupor, accepting more loads on their backs, more burdens and trudging onward to their miserable graves.

And all these in a country that is blessed with oil and gas, gold, lead/zinc, limestone, salt, tantalite, marble/dolomite, kaolin/ magnesium, bentonite, gypsum, clay, uranium, abundance of water, large swathes of arable land and great numbers to till the soil and create happy livelihoods. Just that the leaders have stolen them all and left the people with only sorrow, tears and blood.

The Change mantra of the APC brought in a Buhari that was 'dead' and 'lifeless' on arrival, who borrowed Nigeria into the future of their children, while the Renewed Hope shibboleth has ushered in a Tinubu that is arrogant and haughty from the first day. One of those in Nigeria all along has

now come to lead us safely to Golgotha and to quiet demise.

And every time government presses the donkeys down with more weight, they will complain in the buses or taxis, and in the offices, go to their worship places in the evening and go to bed at night. They don't rise up, they don't take action, they don't block the roads.

The unions are decea-sed, professional groups are mute as mules, even student groups have joined the choir and the once vibrant youths are only too happy to sing praises to the politicians and be allowed to eat the remains at the murderer's table after dinner is over.

"This country eh, na only God go help us oooo." That's a lie, brother-man, God will never come down and help you. It's up to you to do that shift, only you are just too fucking scared to do it, too fucking weak to let your traducers know that you are dying.

We used to have refineries, you know, and petrol and kerosene were sold in Naira; all that seems so long ago now. Today the refineries have been sabotaged and petrol and kerosene are now imported and sold to us in dollars, after Tinubu crashed the Naira in his first week as president.

But what do they care about the Naira when they no longer touch the damned paper. Tinubu tells us to sacrifice, yet he himself has been

globetrotting and his National Assembly just got a N70 billion boon, to sort themselves out while waiting for bulletproof SUVs to arrive.

There is no doubt that it is Tinubu's turn to rule, according to his midnight agreement with Buhari, but isn't it our turn too, to express what we are going through, what we feel, to come out to the streets and make a point?

The price of everything has been quadrupled, but wages remain stagnant. Tinubu is tearing us up with a raw and unsterilized knife, yet he did not think of administering anesth-esia to reduce the pain we feel. What exactly are the great army of suffering Nigerians waiting for before they take action?

Mr. Tinubu and his camp arrived at the presidency without a whiff of political philosophy and the elite deck is going to be re-stacked in the coming days by the conspiracy of party men. And being so conceited, they have no regrets or apologies for us, only bellicose and belligerent yelling from Mr. Dele Alake to all who ask why.

The Renewed Hope promi-ses no hope at all, and all men of good conscience must stand up to be counted at this time. To do otherwise, by failing to speak and rise up is to commit suicide in advance.

Dominic Kidzu, a journalist and commentator on social issues, writes from Calabar.



Nigerian universities and e-learning

On more than one occasion, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has stated that Nigeria cannot efficiently operate e-learning programmes in its universities due to lack of infrastructure, electricity supply and internet access. These shortcomings will require some time to address. Sadly, lack of infrastructure and electricity supply has been the bane of our existence in Nigeria for many decades now - with internet access joining the list more recently. These have affected not just e-learning but, every other sector, industry, and the general quality of life in Nigeria.

The entry of Coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria and the lockdown that followed in the first half of 2019 highlighted the critical need for an online alternative for almost every sector.

At the onset of the lockdown, even developed countries struggled to transit seamlessly to e-learning, and many developing countries could not. In Nigeria, the private education space adopted a pseudo solution for e-learning. However, majority of the learning population were left stranded. Even in private schools, the factors listed above made e-learning less efficient and more expensive than it should be.

The need for e-learning or online education was not only occasioned by the lockdown or inability of many schools to operate physically. E-learning is the future of formal education. For example, in a cosmopolitan university that cannot accommodate all students on campus, we often have students commuting to and from the campus from far-off places. Online classes should be an option to make learning for such students more convenient. It will also allow the schools to reach potential students across state and country lines. Currently, Nigeria has now less than 92 public universities and 79 private universities. Most of the public universities lack basic requirements for efficient learning. There are not enough computers, and most students cannot afford laptops.

Where there are available devices, an epileptic or absence of electricity supply means devices cannot be powered or used as needed. Additionally, battery life is always at risk with erratic charging and sometimes sub-optimal voltage. Alternate power supply is available but requires additional financial capacity. Internet data is still relatively expensive in Nigeria, and we do not have enough fibre network across the country (or even in states) to provide the seamless streaming required for online educational interaction. Given these challenges, the NUC needs a plan to address these issues for e-learning to be fully adopted. Currently, lecturers and students use personal resources to augment the almost non-existent infrastructure. These personalised solutions are not secure or properly coordinated. They are also costly. Some options to mitigate these infrastructure and cost challenges include the NUC or educational institutions entering partnerships with leading infrastructure providers to procure equipment in bulk and take advantage of economies of scale. Corporate bodies and multinationals can also devote some of their CSR budgets to enabling e-learning in tertiary institutions which act as a feeder into the pool from which they search for and recruit talent. Indeed a few companies in the Telecoms, Technology and Banking sectors have supported some universities by providing free Wi-Fi hotspots. These gestures are, however, merely drops in the ocean!

It is also pertinent to note that Infrastructure is just one aspect of the system. Another significant aspect is the content. To successfully implement and adopt e-learning, the content needs to be prepared in suitable e-formats and modules. Platforms for testing, recording, assignments also need to be created and populated. Yet another aspect which is probably the most critical is training and change management. Teachers that will deliver training via e-learning and the students who will interact via this mode need to embrace change. Finally, the entire e-learning system must pass integrity and quality tests. This is crucial for our accreditations from an e-learning system to be viewed as credible anywhere in the world. Putting all of this in place requires planning, investment, and resources. This will take a bit of time but obviously should be prioritised over an acceptable timeframe as it is evident that the rest of the world is not waiting or slowing down. A point to note is that of sixteen countries with the best conditions for implementing e-learning in the world, ten were ranked as having the top education systems in general. Given this interesting correlation between the quality of education systems in a country and their ability to implement e-learning successfully, a disturbing question comes up. Is implementing e-learning in our universities akin to merely putting lipstick on a pig? Whatever it is, we cannot delay e-learning. The time for a thorough overhaul of our educational system is now!



To successfully implement and adopt e-learning, the content needs to be prepared in suitable e-formats and modules. Platforms for testing, recording, assignments also need to be created and populated.

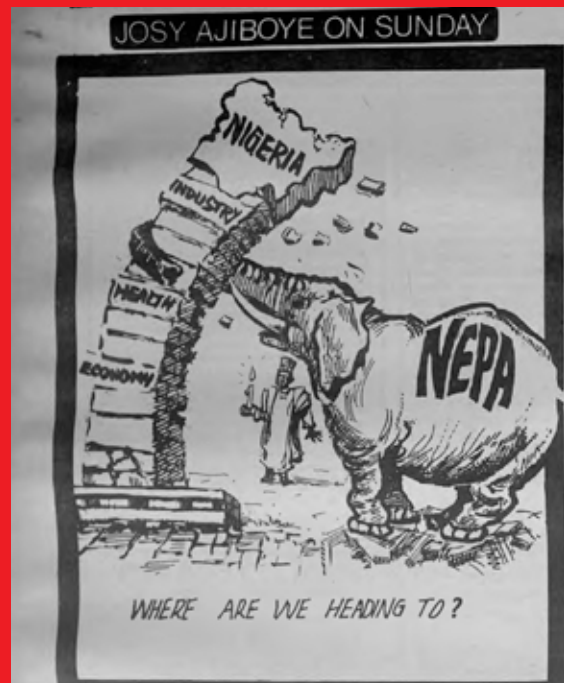


Cartoons from our Archives

626-STN-1980-09-21-024



626-STN-1980-09-28-032



Words on Marble



Olusegun Obasanjo
My gut feelings and my faith tell me that until God shuts a door, no human can shut it.



Nwankwo Kanu
Trophies are good, but saving somebody who could die, giving them hope of a life, that means a lot to me.



Mike Tyson
We all have struggles in life but we have to continue to fight.

NSITF gives over 100 disabled workers artificial body parts

UKPONO UKPONG

Apparently displaying milk of kindness to workers that sustained injuries in the workplace, the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) said since its inception, it has provided artificial body parts to over 100 disabled workers.

The management has also resolved its face-off with staff members over welfare matters.

Managing Director (MD) of NSITF, Barrister Maureen Allagoa, disclosed these while fielding questions from journalists at the weekend in Abuja.

It is recalled that there was a disagreement between the management and the unions in NSITF over welfare issues that attracted the intervention of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Kachollom Daju.

The Permanent Secretary got the feuding parties to reach an amicable resolution of all disagreements and restore a harmonious working environment.

Asked on the current situation as regards the welfare of workers that necessitated the planned strike, the MD said: "We went for a conciliatory meeting and our Permanent Secretary called us for this meeting. By and large, we resolved all the issues. She even mandated us to go further and talk with our unions, NUBIFE and ASSIBI-

FI, on two particular issues -which we did." However, the issue on the coalescing, it was resolved that we take it to the Office of the Head of Civil Service since it is an establishment issue. So, there is peace and calm in NSITF. We have come to a meeting of minds, and we are waiting for the outcome of this issue on the coalescing of Grade Levels."

Allagoa added: "The welfare of our staff has always been of particular interest to me because I have worked with them right from my time as Regional Manager. I was an Executive Director (Administration) where I became fully exposed to the welfare issues.

"Now being the Managing Director of NSITF, I have greater opportunity to address those issues that I have been very familiar with. Therefore, I would continue to make efforts to champion necessary changes in our welfare policy to ensure betterment of staff in order to boost their morale and motivate them for higher productivity.

"On the issues raised, Management and the Unions reached a mutually acceptable resolution on all the issues of tax remittance, National Housing Fund remittance, promotion exercise, among others."

On one of the contentious issues, tax remittances, she said: "The issue of unremitted pension has been

addressed with the Unions. Plans are currently in place to resolve the observed shortfall as mutually agreed at our conciliatory meeting with the Permanent Secretary.

"On the issue of promotion, to eliminate issues of stagnation as a result of delay in promotion, we will maintain the practice that the Fund concludes promotion exercise within the applicable year. Currently, efforts are being made to conduct the 2023 promotion within the set time-

line. The Fund's promotion exercise at the officers' cadre is solely based on performance. Once an officer meets the pass mark, the officer is promoted. However, for the management cadre, promotion is guided by performance and available vacancies."

Also, commenting on the issue of National Housing Fund, she said: "The non-remittance into staff account was purely due to operational issue within the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria.

This has been resolved with the management on consistent engagements.

"Staff have started receiving alerts on the payments. The Fund has been remitting deducted NHF fund to FMBN as required. There are proofs to that.

"Other welfare interventions made by this administration include the collapsing of the housing allowance differential for the outstation staff. All staff now earn the same salary irrespective of your posting, unlike the pre-

vious practice where staff in Abuja earned double of the housing allowance for outstation staff.

"The staff health care plan was upgraded in March, 2023 so as to have more coverage for health conditions hitherto not covered in the old health care scheme. This was to ensure that quality health care is accessible to staff. Besides, a new staff condition of service became operational in the Fund, January, 2023 after 28 years of last review."

Delta talks tough on traffic indiscretion around major facility in Asaba

NOSA ÀKEÑZUA,
ASABA

Permanent Secretary (PS) in Delta State Ministry of Transport, Engr Gabriel Fuludu, has reaffirmed the government's resolve to deal decisively with perpetrators of all forms of illegalities around the Koka Junction flyover, Interchange Bridge in Asaba, the State capital.

Fuludu stated this when he supervised the sensitization and awareness creation exercise to keep motorists, commuters and other road users abreast of urgent need to keep the surroundings of the flyover and interchange bridge, free from any form of traffic encumbrances.

The PS said that it had come to the notice of the state government that the interchange bridge and its surroundings had become abode for miscreants and other illegal business activities such as hawking, loitering and, especially, parking of commercial buses, cabs, tricycles and motorcycles. "It is evident that commercial vehicles scout and drop passengers within the circumference of the bridge," he said.



Fuludu stated that "the reason we deplored Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIOs) and operatives of the Delta State Traffic Management Authority (DESTMA) to carry out a four-day sensitization/awareness campaign is to adequately inform motorists, commuters and the public that last week was for the sensitization, while this week would be for enforcement."

A statement from the Ministry of Transport, which disclosed these, indicated that all illegal parking of vehicles, buses, tricycles, motorcycles as well as trading or hawking, loitering of individuals and groups of people have resultant negative effects, causing avoidable accidents and distorting the aesthetics and cleanliness of the circumference of the bridge. Commercial and private ve-

hicle owners were advised not to park or wait inside their vehicles, while under or within the circumference of the bridge. Also, it warned that loitering and trading in any guise would no longer be entertained, adding that illegal motor parks in all adjoining roads to the bridge should be disbanded.

Niger to host national green economy

SAKA BOLAJI -
MINNA

Niger State is to host a National Green Economy Summit.

The event is slated for October 25-25, 2023 in Minna, the State capital.

A statement issued by Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Alhaji Abubakar Usman disclosed that the summit is aimed at repositioning the State for sustainable socio-economic development as well as make it the Green Investment Hub of the country.

According to the SSG, "the summit, which will coincide with the United Nations Day for Climate Advocacy and International Day for Climate Action, will also underscore the resolve to partake in achieving collective global goals through responsible local action."

The SSG further explained that the summit will bring together policy-

makers, industry leaders, academia, local and international sector experts, and non-governmental organizations.

Other vital groups expected at the gathering are international development partners, investors, local communities and other relevant stakeholders to pave the way for an inclusive green economy and a sustainable future for the State and the country as a whole.

The theme of the Summit is 'Harnessing Green Assets and Innovation for Niger State's Prosperity'.

The event will unlock the State's Green Economy potential and achieve prosperity for its people, the statement stressed.

Alhaji Usman further revealed that the summit will provide concrete actions that will lead to a greener, more sustainable, and prosperous future for the State and the citizenry.

Oyo waste consultant, Mottainai to recruit environmental health officers

STEPHEN GBADAMOSI,
IBADAN

The waste management consultant to Oyo State government, Mottainai Recycling Limited, has announced its plan to recruit about 200 environmental health officers.

The revelation was made weekend by the firm through its Chief Strategy Officer, Ms. Uloma Airhienbuwa, in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital.

According to her, the ad-hoc environmental health officers to be recruited would be deployed to the state's gateways.

She added that they would be in all the Local Government Areas of the state to

educate residents on the best sanitary practices, in order to avoid the spread of transmissible and communicable diseases, adding that the firm was seeking to employ environmental health officers, environmental health technologists, environmental health technicians and environmental health assistants.

The strategy chief, therefore, called on suitably qualified candidates to log on to their site, adding that the job opening would close on August 14.

Ms. Airhienbuwa also called on residents of the state to cooperate with government and be conscious of their environment.

"We have to keep our environment healthy and clean at all times," she added.



We'll restore lost glory of Warri –Oborewori

NOSA ÀKEÑZUA,
ASABA

Governor Sheriff Oborewori of Delta State yesterday said his administration would restore the lost glory of Warri, Uvwie and environs through massive infrastructural renewal and environmental sustainability.

Oborewori, accompanied by his wife, Tobore, and top government functionaries, stated this at a thanksgiving service in honour of the Speaker of the State House of Assembly, Hon. Emomotimi Guwor at the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Redemption Hall, Mega Parish, Effurun, Uvwie Local Government Area of the State.

The Governor said he was delighted to join the Speaker and his family in thanking God for his elevation as number one lawmaker in the State. He said God is always pleased when men gave thanks to Him and admonished the Speaker to

hold on to God in his private and public life.

Speaking on flooding in Warri and environs, Gov. Oborewori said his administration would demolish all structures built along waterways and warned against dumping of refuse on drainages to give way for free flow of flood water in the area.

He said: "A few days ago, I was sent a viral video on the flooded Airport Road in Warri which, of course, was caused by our people because they have built structures along waterways.

They have also blocked drainage channels with refuse, but I can assure you that drainages in Warri will be taken care of and flood will no longer disturb our people when we are through.

"We will rebuild infrastructure in Warri with good roads, flyovers, drainages and street lights and we shall restore the lost glory of the oil city."

The Governor, while rejoicing with the Speaker

and his family, urged him to trust God and to remain humble and accountable to his colleagues.

"For you to survive as Speaker, as a leader, you must be humble, transparent and accountable and it is on record that I paid N530 million into the treasury and I also left money in the coffers of the State House of Assembly.

"There is no House of Assembly in the country that has done what I did and it is my prayer that you succeed and perform better than I did.

"I survived six years as Speaker because I had a good Governor who listened, and I urge you to always do the right thing despite pressure.

"As Governor, I am committed to the welfare of the legislature and we will work together to make life more meaningful for our people," he said.

Earlier in his remark, Speaker Guwor thanked his guests for honouring the

invitation and expressed gratitude to God for elevating him to position of number one lawmaker in the State.

In his message, Pastor in charge of RCCG, Region 23, Pastor Charles Obasa said leaders must endeavour to live a life of purpose, motive and vision to make impact in the lives of the people they are leading. He prayed for the wisdom, knowledge and understanding of God upon leaders in Delta and the country.

The thanksgiving service was attended by the Governor of Taraba State, Dr Kefas Agbu, represented by the Speaker; wife of the Deputy Governor, Mrs Catherine Onyeme; immediate past Governor of the State, Senator Ifeanyi Okowa; immediate past Deputy Governor, Deacon Kingsley Otuaro; and State Chairman of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Kingsley Esiso, as well as many other dignitaries.



Ex-NIMASA DG, Peterside, to address global bunker forum

BY OUR REPORTER

From all over the world, a total of 500 experts, regulators, investors, operators and policymakers will listen to one of the leading voices on African maritime issues, Dr Dakuku Peterside speak during the International Bunker Industry Association (IBIA) Africa conference in Accra, Ghana.

The august event is billed for September 5-7 this year.

Dr. Peterside, who is the immediate past Director General (DG) of Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), will be sharing thoughts and ideas with gurus at the event which has become a world-renowned forum for the international bunker industry.

The organizers — the IBIA — is the voice of the global bunker industry and represents all stakeholders across the industry value chain.

A public sector turnaround expert, Peterside will be speaking from a well-informed background, having also been the Chairman of

the Association of Africa Maritime Administrations (AAMA), while he served as NIMASA helmsman.

During his term, Peterside rejuvenated the maritime regulatory agency and made it one of the most admired among Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA) in Nigeria.

A co-founder of Growth and Transformation Professionals (GTpro), Africa's foremost government relations and policy strategy consultancy firm, the expert brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the conference that promises to look at the dynamics in the African maritime sector.

Since leaving NIMASA, Dr. Peterside has had several speaking engagements in several countries, within and outside Africa, where he continued to share his thoughts and processes with government officials, maritime operators, regulators and investors.

In 2023 alone, he has been the lead speaker in maritime conferences in Kenya, Egypt, Singapore and South Africa.



Sickle cell anaemia ravages Delta

NOSA ÀKEÑZUA,
ASABA

Sickle cell anemia is currently ravaging Delta State with no fewer than 75 deaths recorded in the past one year.

Although the State Government has revved up necessary machinery to save the ugly situation, reports said public hospitals in Asaba, Ughelli, Warri, Ogwashi Uku and privately-owned medical facilities, where patients present for treatment, experience a flood of patients.

In Asaba, this year, at

least 17 persons have been reported dead from the disorder at a Federal Government-owned hospital while 12 others are reportedly currently battling for life.

Sources revealed that the increasing death figures have been source of concern to the state government.

Worried by the increase in cases of sickle cell anemia, the government has made it compulsory for every new-born baby in the state to undergo thorough screening within 48 hours of birth.

A sickle cell focal person

in Asaba, Dr Uche Okwe, who spoke to journalists at the weekend, noted that the mandatory screening for babies became necessary for early detection and to help solve several associated challenges.

He said the measure would make it easier to manage afflicted children with little or no crisis.

While soliciting for support for media practitioners to sensitize the public, she revealed that 2,000 babies have been screened since it became mandatory few days ago, 26 of whom test-

ed positive.

Dr Okwe further disclosed that over 20,000 persons are currently living with sickle cell in the state, adding that treatment for the patients are free in the State for tests through sickle cell clinics.

While lamenting the ignorance of many people who still attribute sickle cell disorder to spirituality, Dr Okwe noted that people should check their genotypes before going into marriage, adding that it is the best preventive care practice.

Lawmaker condoles with Idoani monarch over wife's demise

STEPHEN GBADAMOSI,
IBADAN

Lawmaker representing Ose State constituency in Ondo State House of Assembly, Hon. Olatunji Oshati (aka Maxima) has condoled with the family of His Royal Majesty, the Alaani of Idoani kingdom, Oba Olufemi Olutoye, over the demise of his Olori, Yeyeluwa of Idoani kingdom, Professor (Mrs.) Omotayo Olutoye, whose death occurred at the weekend.

In a statement by Maxima Media Team yesterday, the lawmaker noted that "though Mama departed at a ripe age, she will be greatly missed because she left at a time that her motherly advice and expertise in Yoruba cultures, norms and traditions are most needed, as a long-standing scholar of Yoruba linguistics."

Hon. Oshati, who is also

the Balogun of Idoani land and member of the Alaani-In-Council, said he sympathized with the family and the monarch in particular, noting that losing one's spouse of many decades could be very challenging.

He, however, urged "the Royal Highness to take solace in the fact that Mama had lived a fulfilled life, first as an accomplished scholar and as a worthy Olori and thirdly a successful mother who had many 'firsts' ascribed to her family."

He added: As the very first ever professor of Yoruba linguistics in the world, married to the first Nigerian Army graduate and a mother of a world-class surgeon who is the first surgeon in the world to have ever performed a surgical procedure on a foetus and then return same into the mother's womb to birth after maturation, coupled with Mama's selfless service



to humanity and to God's vineyard,, she was a mother of firsts. Mama was, indeed, fulfilled to the glory of God."

Oshati also sympathized with the entire Idoani com-

munity, called for unity and solidarity with the Oba, even as the family planned programmes that will lead to a befitting burial for the late scholar and matriarch.

Kwara govt praises NGO for cleaning community

KEHINDE AKINPELU,
ILORIN

Kwara State Government, again, cautioned the people of the state, especially Tanke community in Ilorin South Local Government Area (LGA), to desist from indiscriminate disposal of refuse, commending a non-governmental organization (NGO),

Blue-lily Humanitarian and Empowerment Initiative, for its complementary service.

Secretary/Acting General Manager, Kwara State Environmental Protection Agency (KWEPA), Hajia Folohunso Idayat, stated this at the weekend during a clean-up exercise by the NGO.

The Lagos based NGO had embarked on evacuation of waste at a river bank

beside Chapel Secondary School Junction, Tanke, – a community service that saved the area from being an eyesore.

Idayat commended the founder of Blue-lily, Yeside Olasimbo Aminat for being patriotic and complementing government's efforts at ensuring a clean and safe environment for the citizenry.

The KWEPA boss, who reaffirmed government's commitment to a decent waste management system, said the agency will not rest on its oars to keep the state tidy and safe through regular campaigns against abuse of the physical environment, and by embarking on enforcement exercises.

The exercise featured members of the NGO, offi-

cial of the state Ministry of Environment and KWEPA, with the agency making available the necessary support tools.

Founder of Blue-lily, Aminat, said the organization was established in January 2023 in response to humanitarian concerns, and to help people clean up their environment.

"We are trying to sensi-

tize the locals about proper waste management culture, and to foster community bonding through collaborative cleaning efforts. And our focus is on climate change and climate attributes which could result in flooding and land degradation among other natural or non-natural causes that can affect the livelihood of the people," she said.



L-R: Adedayo Adelegan, Growth Marketing Manager (Enterprise), Interswitch; Robinta Aluyi, Group Head, Sales & Accounts Management, Digital Infrastructure & Managed Services (Interswitch Systegra); Silvia Boblea, Marketing Executive, Stratus Technologies; and Pieter Van Der Merwe, Regional Manager, Sales and Business Development (Africa and Middle East) Stratus Technologies at the recently concluded Nigerian Oil & Gas (NOG) Energy Week in Abuja.

Okowa's ex-aide elected Ika leader, seeks Emezie's release

NOSA ÀKEŌZUA,
ASABA

Eugene Azuka Uzum, former Special Adviser on Orientation to immediate past Governor of Delta State, Ifeanyi Okowa, has been elected Chairman of Ika People's Congress (IPC) Worldwide.

In a swift reaction to Uzum's emergence, a Canada-based Nigerian, Mr. Friday Owah, described the development as a new dawn for the Ika nation, saying that with what he described as Uzum's high level of integrity and capacity, Ika would reach greater heights.

Mr. Owah recounted Uzum's days at the university as a student union leader

and at the Law School, adding that the new chairman had a burning passion to positively transform Ika nation.

He enjoined Ika people at home and in the Diaspora to give Uzum the needed support to actualize his passion to lead them to better days, just as he prayed God to continue to bless Uzum with the wisdom and enablement to continue to uplift not only the Ika people and Deltans, but humanity in general.

Meanwhile, Uzum has passionately appealed to the Federal Government (FG) to release the embattled former Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Mr. Godwin Emezie, because of his failing health.

Private farm in Akwa Ibom boosts rural community

ISAAC JOB,
UYO.

Managing Director (MD) of Genevito Farms, Ndon Akpaiko, Ibekwe Akpan Nya, Mkpatt Enin Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Apostle John Okoriko said the palm tree plantation has a capacity to produce more than 26,000 litres of palm oil monthly.

Okoriko also stated that 4,000 stands of palm trees across 75 hectares of land in the farm can generate employment opportunities to change the fortunes of rural communities in the area.

Speaking with newsmen in Uyo at the weekend, Okoriko said the plantation has a nursery section where palm tree seedlings are raised for other farmers and for the expansion of the farm. It also possesses a harvesting unit and planned milling department for full-fledged production of a brand of palm oil known as special palm oil (SPO)

for export.

Okoriko, who is the founder of Solid Rock Kingdom Church, further explained that of the plantation's land mass, only 25 hectares are cultivated, leaving 50,000 acres uncultivated.

He said the palm seedlings were obtained from Nigeria Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR) in Abak, pointing out that they are nursed yearly for expansion of the farm and for other farmers in rural communities in the state.

"Last year, we had 7,000 seedlings from our nursery, and it was not enough for farmers. We are nursing more seedlings to expand our farm and supply other farmers.

"The farm has a nursery unit with good species of sprout out nuts packaged in nursery bags as best management practice to prepare the seedlings for transplant which takes only two years before fruiting," he said.

Okoriko disclosed that the farm has over 120 farm workers tend-

ing the facility.

He said: "Out of 120 workers, we engage 80 of them as casual workers, especially when we want to harvest the farm while the rest are permanently on our payroll."

"By next week, we would harvest the farm for the month of July and our harvest is always very bountiful. This is the period we use both permanent and casual workers on the farm.

"Engaging this number of persons in the rural area means a lot in terms of fighting unemployment and involving women to process palm oil."

He described palm oil production as a lucrative investment as nothing in palm fruits is wasted in the entire production chain.

"Nothing is wasted in palm trees. The production is simple, automatic markets to end products, direct impacts on development of rural dwellers while increment of income to rural communities can be achieved as well as engaging youths in the production chain," he noted.

STEPHEN GBADAMOSI,
IBADAN

The suspension order placed on the annual Egungun festival in Ibadan, Oyo State, by the Olubadan of Ibadanland, Oba (Senator) Lekan Balogun, Alli Okunmade II, last Sunday, due to the spate of violence recorded in two different places within the metropolis, has been lifted.

This was contained in the statement made available to journalists in Ibadan at the weekend by the Personal Assistant (Media) to the Olubadan, Oladele Ogunsola.

The development came just as the Oloolu, the masquerade that features in the grand finale of the annual festival, which was represented by the Mogaji of Ile Aje, Ode-Aje, Chief Kazeem Omotoso, who featured on Fresh FM programme, 'Agbami Oselu,' yesterday, said there would be no fear of intimidation after the commencement of the festival.

Ogunsola stated that the suspension was lifted after rapprochement between the Olubadan's Palace and the heads of masquerades (Alaagbaas) in the land.

Following the development, a letter, according to the press release, had

Olubadan lifts suspension on Egungun festival in

been sent to the State Police Commissioner requesting the Command to make adequate provision for security coverage for the masquerades and their supporters.

He stressed that the meeting between the palace and the Alaagbaas early last week ensured extraction of commitment to peaceful celebration of the festival from the adherents.

The letter to the State Commissioner of Police read further: "Following this development, His Imperial Majesty, therefore, seeks for your esteemed cooperation by ensuring adequate security coverage for the masquerades and their supporters, just as an order is also given that whoever engages in any act of violence must not be allowed to go Scott-free.

"His Imperial Majesty reiterates his zero tolerance for any form of brigandage or violence in the course of the celebration of the festival and at all times."

It would be recalled that the Olubadan wielded the big stick, owing to occurrences of violence; but he had to consider leniency

with the adherents, in view of the importance of the festival to the metropolis, however with a stern warning that any masquerade found fomenting trouble would face total ban.

The Alaagbaas, who pleaded with the Olubadan, to temper justice with mercy, insisted that none of the violence that occurred was as a result of rivalry between opposing masquerades, but that they were caused by hoodlums hiding under cover of the festival to attack innocent residents and loot shops.

Their statement said the Alaagbaas appealed to the security agents to be more committed to the safety of lives and property of the people, saying "we don't believe or engage in violence as admonished by our revered monarch and we pledge our cooperation with the security agents not to interfere in their line of duty. Let them arrest whoever is found causing trouble and any of us that shows up with a view to secure bail for such identified and arrested criminal should be detained alongside the culprit."

Barau appoints two professors, newspaper editor, late Ajimobi's son as SAs

TUNDE OPALANA,
 ABUJA

Deputy Senate President, Senator Jibrin I. Barau, has announced the appointment of Professor Muhammad Ibn Abdullahi as Chief of Staff; Professor Bashir Muhammad Fagge, Special Adviser (Policy & Monitoring); and the Deputy General Editor of Daily Trust Newspapers, Ismail Mudashir, Special Adviser (Media and Publicity).

In a statement by his media office, Senator Barau also named Idris Abiola Ajimobi, the son of the late Oyo State Governor, Abiola Ajimobi, as Special Adviser (Special Duties); Yusuf Aliyu Tumfafi, Special Adviser (Political); Mrs. Ngozi Ndawi

Nkemdirim, a pioneer staff of the National Assembly, Special Adviser (Administration); and Shitu Madaki Kunchi, Special Assistant (Media and Publicity).

Professor Ibn Abdullahi, born in Faruruwa, Shano Local Government Area (LGA), Kano State, was until this appointment, the Head of Department, Education, School of Continuing Education, Bayero University Kano (BUK).

The professor of Guidance and Counselling obtained B.A. (Ed)/ Islamic Studies, BUK, M.Ed/Guidance and Counselling (Unijos) and Ph.D. in Guidance and Counselling, BUK.

Fagge, a Professor of Animal Science, hails from Fagge in Fagge LGA of Kano

State. He attended Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto for his B.Sc in Agriculture; and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University for his M.Sc and Ph.D.

He served as the Provost of the Federal College of Education Technical, Bichi, Kano State between 2015 and 2023. He was a member of the Senior Executive Course 40 of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos, Plateau State.

Mudashir, who hails from Kwara State, was born in Zamfara State. Until this appointment, he was the Deputy General Editor of the Daily Trust Newspapers.

While in Daily Trust, he held various positions including Regional Editor (Kano), Group Politics Editor, State House correspondent and Head of the National Assembly. He started his journalism career in 2003 at the New Nigerian Newspapers (NNN), Kaduna.

He studied Mass Communication at the Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State; Kaduna Polytechnic;

Bayero University Kano; and Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi, India, for his undergraduate and post-graduate studies.

Ajimobi, the son of the late Oyo State Governor, Abiola Ajimobi, had his primary and secondary education in Nigeria before moving to England, where he furthered his studies and graduated with a degree in Business Management in 2004. He also obtained a master's degree in international relations in London.

Nkemdirim, who was born in Jos, Plateau State, hails from Imo State. The graduate of the University of Calabar, Cross River State, has three decades of experience at the National Assembly.

Until her appointment, she was the Director, Journals and Procedure of the Senate. In 2008, she obtained a Master's in International Administration from the London Metropolitan University, UK. She has attended various training on legislative drafting and parliamentary procedure.

Barau, who represents Kano North Senatorial District, said the appointees were selected based on

their track records in their respective professions. He said the appointments take immediate effect.



Bodies not from Lekki tollgate -Lagos govt

Lagos State Government said yesterday that the bodies of 103 victims of #EndSARS protest in October 2020 which were made ready for mass burial were not from the Lekki tollgate.

The tollgate was the scene of alleged shooting by the military deployed to break the protesters, with concerns raised that many persons were killed in the process.

However, a government panel which investigated the incident said nine persons lost their lives than thought.

In a statement, yesterday, the State Government claimed the bodies were picked up from different parts of Lagos such as Ikeja, Ajah, Isolo, Ikorodu, and other areas and not from Lekki

tollgate.

The statement also cited the jailbreak that happened at Ikoyi Prison and insisted no bodies were retrieved from the tollgate incident.

It reads: "For the records, the Lagos State Environmental Health Unit picked up bodies in the aftermath of #EndSARS violence and community clashes at Fagba, Ketu, Ikorodu, Orile, Ajegunle, Abule-Egba, Ikeja, Ojota, Ekoru, Ogba, Isolo and Ajah areas of Lagos State.

"There was also a jailbreak at Ikoyi Prison. The 103 casualties mentioned in the document were from these incidents and NOT from Lekki Toll-gate as being alleged. For the avoidance of doubt, no body was retrieved from the Lekki Toll Gate incident."



Unknown gunmen attack Maku's residence

BY OUR REPORTER

There was drama in sleepy Akun, Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area (LGA), Nasarawa State, on Saturday night when gunmen stormed the home of the community's most illustrious son and former Minister of Information, Mir Labaran Maku.

The motive of the military-style assault on his residence was not known as of press time, but the gunmen fled as soldiers quickly arrived the scene.

However, their visit took a toll on four security men in Mr. Maku's residence as they were injured by the assailants.

In a statement yesterday, signed by Peter Ahemba, Senior Special Assistant (SSA) on Public Affairs to Governor Abdullahi Sule of Nasarawa State, which disclosed news of the raid, the governor was



quoted as describing the attack as "unfortunate."

He condemned the incident, which was carried out by yet-to-be-identified men.

"The state government is already partnering with the top Military Command, the Police and other Para-military agencies to ensure that the bandits fleeing from oth-

er parts of the country as a result of military onslaughts against them do not have hiding places in Nasarawa State," he said.

Sule also warned criminal elements operating under whatever guise to desist from evil, saying the state will be a boiling cauldron for them.

The governor, who extended his deepest sympathy to Maku, promised to stem the tides of insecurity in all parts of the state.

He said he had directed the police and other security agencies to arrest the criminal elements so they can face the full wrath of the law.

Shettima departs Abuja for summits in Italy, Russia

UKPONO UKPONG

Vice President Kashim Shettima yesterday departed Abuja to represent President Bola Tinubu at two major international summits in Rome, Italy, and St Petersburg, Russia.

At the Rome event, Vice President Shettima will join other global leaders for the first Stocktaking Moment (STM) Summit themed 'Transforming Food Sys-

tems for People, Planet and Prosperity', holding from Monday to Wednesday July 24-26.

During the summit, the Vice President will chair a high-level session themed 'Innovative Financing for Food System Transformation: The Case of Nigeria' and the side event on 'Scaling up Multi Stakeholders' Collaboration and Investment in the Implementation of Food Systems Transformation Pathways in Nigeria'.

The event is being organized in collaboration with the Rome-based UN agencies -the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and World Food Programme (WFP), as well as the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub and wider UN system.

Vice President Shettima will then proceed to St. Petersburg to represent the President at

the Russia-Africa Summit scheduled from Wednesday to Saturday, July 24-29.

While in Russia, the Vice President will join other political and business leaders at the 2nd Russia-Africa Summit and Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum focused on strategizing to enhance relations between Russia and the African continent, among other benefits.

Also, Vice President

Shettima will participate in bilateral meetings with representatives of relevant Russian senior government officials and business leaders to discuss relations between Russia and Nigeria.

Vice President Shettima, who is accompanied by senior government officials from Ministries, Departments and Agencies, is expected back in the country at the end of the week.



Elon Musk: Time to say goodbye to Twitter logo

Twitter owner Elon Musk has said he wants to get rid of the Twitter bird logo, and replace it with an "X". However, Mr Musk also has a history of making statements that fail to happen or are not serious.

Mr Musk, who has changed the name of the business to X Corp, said the replacement "should have been done a long time ago".

According to reports, the billionaire wants to create a "super app" called "X" which is similar to China's WeChat.

He said on Sunday he was looking to change Twitter's logo, tweeting: "And soon we shall bid adieu to the Twitter brand and, gradually, all the birds."

He then said that an interim logo would go live later the same day.

Musk posted an image of a flickering "X" on Twitter, and later in a Twitter Spaces audio chat, replied "Yes" when asked if the Twitter logo will change, adding that "it should have been done a long time ago".

The company's CEO, Linda Yaccarino, wrote on the platform that the rebrand was an exciting new opportunity.

"Twitter made one massive impression and changed the way we communicate," she said.

"Now, X will go further, transforming the global town square."



For some people in Asia, super-apps including India's PayTM and Indonesia's GoJek have been a vital part of everyday lives for the past few years.

The apps let users pay for services through a finance system.

WeChat is a messaging and social media platform that has evolved into one of the region's biggest apps in terms of its range of services and number of users.

Last year, it was estimated to have 1.29 billion users in China alone.

Since Mr Musk bought Twitter in October 2022, the company has changed its business name to X Corp.

Twitter's website says its logo, depicting a blue bird, is "our most recognisable asset". "That's why we're so protective of it," it added.

The firm temporarily replaced the logo in April with Dogecoin's Shiba Inu dog,

helping drive a surge in the meme coin's market value.

Mr Musk was later accused of insider trading by a group of Dogecoin investors, who claimed he had profited from driving up Dogecoin's value.

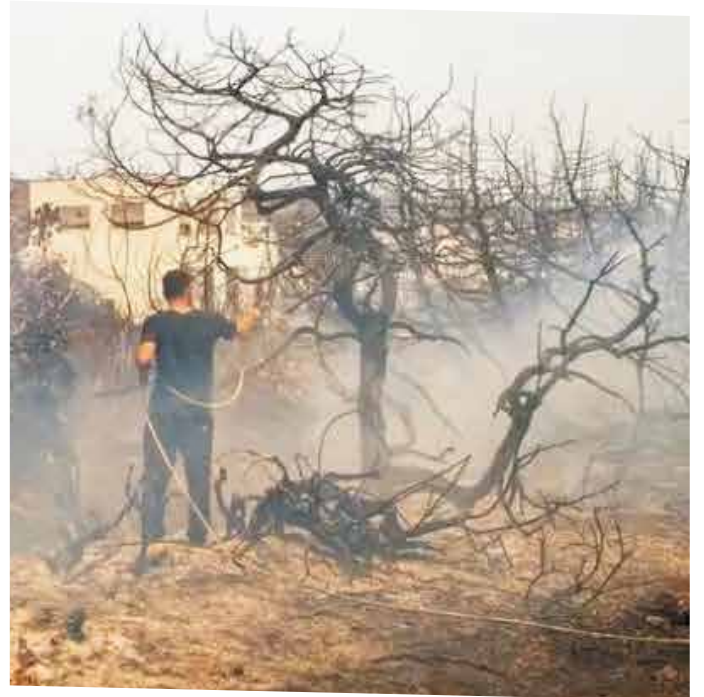
The company was criticised by users and marketers when Mr Musk announced earlier this month that there would be a limit on how many tweets per day various account holders can read.

The daily limits helped in the growth of Meta-owned rival service Threads, which had more than 100 million sign-ups in five days of launching.

Twitter's most recent complication was a lawsuit filed on Tuesday that claimed the firm owes at least \$500m in severance pay to former employees.

Since Mr Musk bought it, the company has laid off more than half its workforce.

UK sends rapid deployment team to Rhodes to help Britons leave



Britain's foreign office has deployed a rapid deployment team of five ministry staff and four British Red Cross responders to Rhodes to support British nationals on the island, a government spokesperson said on Sunday.

"We are actively monitoring the fires in Rhodes and are in close contact with local authorities," the

spokesperson said in a statement.

"The FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) has deployed a Rapid Deployment Team (RDT) of five FCDO staff and four British Red Cross responders to Rhodes to support British Nationals, whose safety is our top priority. They will be based at Rhodes International Airport."

Russia launches criminal probe into death of journalist in Ukraine

Russia's Investigative Committee said on Sunday it had launched a criminal probe into the killing

of a Russian war reporter, an incident the country's defence ministry previously blamed on Ukraine's use of cluster

munitions.

The committee said on its website that "armed Ukrainian formations targeted and

deliberately fired at a group of Russian journalists" working near Pyatikhatka, in Ukraine's southeastern Zaporizhzhia region.

It did not specify the type of weapons or munitions used, but said Rostislav Zhuravlev, a journalist for RIA state news agency, was killed.

It said his RIA colleague and journalist Konstantin Mikhalchevsky, and two employees of Izvestia newspaper, Roman Polshakov and Dmitry Shikov, were injured.

"As part of the investigation, investigators will establish all the circumstances of the crime against media representatives, as well as those involved," it said.

It said the chair of the

committee was nominating Zhuravlev, "one of those journalists who always defended and informed the truth," for a medal.

Ukraine, which received supplies of cluster munitions from the United States this month, has vowed to use them only to dislodge concentrations of enemy soldiers. We could not independently verify details of the incident. Both sides have used cluster munitions during Russia's 17-month invasion of Ukraine

The munitions are banned by many countries because they rain shrapnel over a wide area and pose a risk to civilians. Some bomblets typically fail to explode immediately, but can blow up years later.



How tier-1 banks stocks drive market's performance to gain N1.33trn w/w

MOTOLANI OSENI

The bulls resurfaced on the stock market last week, due to investors buying interests in banking stocks, as the market capitalisation gained N1.33trillion week-on-week (w/w) to close at N35.39trillion.

At the close of trading activities on Friday, the benchmark index soar higher on the back of strong buying interests of investors, especially, in banking stocks that fueled the weekly rally.

Thus, the All-Share index advanced by 2,433.66 points or 3.89 per cent week-on-week (W-o-W) to close at 65,003.39 points.

The performance across sectors has predominantly been bullish, with the NGX Banking index and NGX Insurance index fueling the life of bullish party with 15.81 per cent and 5.65 per cent week-on-week gains.

Also, the NGX Industrial Goods index recorded a weekly growth of 2.80 per cent, while NGX Consumer Goods index up by 1.67 per cent and NGX Oil & Gas index appreciated by 0.64 per cent.

The market breadth for the week was positive as 73 equities appreciated in price, 19 equities depreciated in price, while 64 equities remained unchanged. John Holt led the gainers table by 58.01 per cent to close at N2.86, per share. Chellarams followed with a gain of 32.39 per cent to close at

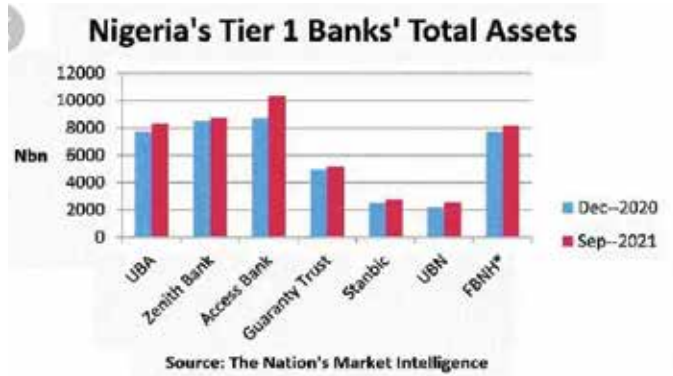
N2.33, while Sterling Financial Holdings Company went up by 27.33 per cent to close to N3.96, per share.

On the other side, FTN Cocoa Processors led the decliners table by 29.08 per cent to close at N2.00, per share. Courteville Business Solutions followed with a loss of 28.09 per cent to close at 64 kobo, while Abbey Mortgage Bank declined by 26.32 per cent to close at N1.12, per share.

Overall, a total turnover of 4.182 billion shares worth N99.048 billion in 41,446 deals was traded last week by investors on the floor of the Exchange, in contrast to a total of 5.246 billion shares valued at N63.417 billion that exchanged hands prior week in 57,234 deals.

The Financial Services Industry (measured by volume) led the activity chart with 3.015 billion shares valued at N36.762 billion traded in 20,079 deals; contributing 72.08 per cent and 37.12 per cent to the total equity turnover volume and value respectively.

The Oil and Gas Industry followed with 311.172 million shares worth N2.128 billion in 3,473 deals, while the Conglomerates Industry traded a turnover of 180.518 million shares worth N787.392 million in 2,111 deals



Petrol subsidy removal: Govt needs to broaden consultations over palliative- ASCSN

JOY OBAKEYE

The Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN), has urged President Bola Tinubu to honour the relevance of the committee set up to develop modalities that will mitigate the impact of the removal of petrol subsidies.

President of the Union, Comrade Tommy Etim Okon, who spoke at a media parley organised by the Labour Writers Association of Nigeria, (LAWAN) said, the Labour union is not happy with the actions of the government towards the committee without having their input.

He explained that the government after his inauguration pronouncing the removal of subsidies invited them to ask what could be done to cushion the effects of subsidies.

According to him, the meeting of the committee has not taken place when they woke up one day and heard that the president has walked up to World Bank for \$5billion loans.

"Borrowing money from World Bank is not in the best

interest of the economy. We felt that the government would have waited for the committee to submit their template," he said.

He noted that the president acted on fair need, that is thinking for the people and not the people thinking for themselves.

"The committee would have set up a work plan to strategies what the people need. The 8000 palliatives for each household means that after six months, the people will be brought into poverty again. It will not help the economy. The president's act on us was trust defence, where the government said something and do another thing.

It would have been more honourable if the president allowed the committee to send in their template, identifying what the people need. Why were we invited to an open discussion? If we were invited and we did not attend, the people will say that labour jettisoned the president but, we honoured the invite and were waiting for the president's call. We were disappointed that he pulled out and we are not happy," he expressed.

He also used the medium to advise the government to go into mass transportation since it's the major challenge we are having right now. He said once the issue of transportation is taken care of,

the cost of goods and services will be reduced such that someone going with 1000 Naira can come with a change.

In investing in the transport system to cushion the effects of fuel Subsidy, he told the federal government to first fix up all the potholes on the road so that the buses that will be brought in will be sustained.

He added that the government can also cluster those in the informal sector, who are into productive ventures, and then pump money into them; that will have a turnover effect that will make them employers of labour, thereby reducing unemployment.

Speaking on Bola Tinubu's recent declaration of a state of emergency on Food, he said, the government should declare a state of emergency on security, according to him ought to have been done before the declaration. He disclosed that the insecurity in Nigeria has affected a lot of things and in most places, people pay to go to the farm.

"Nigeria is blessed. Their problem is that they do not engage people who know the economy, instead, they call people that things have worked for them 200 years from where they are coming from to drive the economy"

Shareholders of NOVA Merchant Bank approve full commercial banking license

TEMITOPE ADEBAYO

NOVA Merchant Bank has received approval from its shareholders to transition into commercial banking.

The shareholders gave their unanimous approval during the company's 6th Annual General Meeting in Lagos on Wednesday, where they agreed that the bank remains well-positioned to sustain and build upon its growth legacy.

At the meeting, the company's Board of Directors took time to unveil their comprehensive restructuring plans on how the bank will transition from a merchant bank to a commercial banking license.

The Chairman, NOVA Merchant Bank, Mr. Phillips Oduoza, who addressed shareholders at the meeting, explained that the decision to transition will help the bank to further streamline its operations, bolster its financial stability, and foster sustainable growth across its businesses.

He said, "I am excited about the prospects of NOVA as we embark on this new growth phase. This strategic move is in line with our vision of expanding operations and diversifying services while providing exceptional services to our valued customers.

Continuing, he said, "The Management of the Bank has firmly established a remarkable legacy of growth since its inception and has consistently demonstrated its ability to achieve substantial progress across various parameters and the commercial banking license will strengthen the Bank's revenue base, entrench value creation, impact earnings growth and sustain higher returns for the shareholders, while affording more banking customers across the nation the opportunity to enjoy the products and services of NOVA Bank."

Expounding on this, NOVA's Managing Director, Mr. Nath Ude, said, that with the new license, the bank is poised to extend its comprehensive range of financial services throughout Nigeria and cement its

position as a leading player in the Nigerian banking industry.

"The resounding approval from the shareholders for the transition to a commercial bank reflects their confidence in NOVA's ability to thrive in the evolving financial landscape. The Bank remains resolute in its pursuit of sustainable growth, while continuing to provide its customers with innovative financial solutions. As we transition into a commercial bank, NOVA aims to expand its services and further enhance its position as a trusted provider of cutting-edge financial solutions in Nigeria," the MD stated.

Ude restated the bank's commitment to continue to invest in new technologies, including our robust digital platform, to create exceptional service experience for its customers.

Shareholders also ratified the bank's result for the full year ended December 31, 2022, where the bank recorded outstanding performance and significant growth across all its indicators on the back of innovative offerings and exceptional customer service.

Specifically, total assets grew by 14.6% to close 2022 at N279.9bn up from N244.2bn recorded the previous year; while profit before tax rose significantly by 107.9 per cent to close the year 2022 at N3.50bn. Profit after tax also recorded a similar feat, as it jumped from N1.58bn in 2021 to N3.21bn in the year under consideration, representing an impressive growth of 102.9%.

NOVA Merchant Bank Limited is an investment grade rated merchant bank in Nigeria that offers an integrated suite of financial solutions covering Financial Intermediation, Wholesale and Investment Banking, Asset and Securities Management, Trade Services, Cash Management, Transaction and Digital Banking. The bank will announce a new name to reflect this strategic change in its banking licence.

Naira gains at I&E window, closes at N742.9/\$1

The Nigerian currency, Naira, at the close of Official trading activities recorded a significant gain against the United States dollar on the Investors and Exporters (I&E), data from the official window shows.

The naira, on Friday extended its gaining streaks to two consecutive days on the spot market after crossing the N800.00/\$1 mark for the first time at the authorised window.

Forex turnover within the segment skyrocketed by over 300 per cent amidst increasing demand for dollars.

According to data published on the FMDQ website, the naira had on Tuesday closed at N742.93 per \$1 as against N795.28 to a dollar it exchanged in the previous session last week Monday.

This signifies a N52.35 or 6.6 per cent appreciation from the N795.28 the local fiat recorded on Monday.

Tuesday's data showed that the naira opened trading at N788.17, slumped to a low of N831.00, and touched a high of N707.99 within the business

cycle before it settled at N742.93 per \$1 at the close of the day's business.

The authorised session recorded foreign exchange supply of \$156.29 million, implying a 352.4 per cent increase from \$34.55 million posted on Monday.

However, the currency plummeted further at the unauthorised market on Tuesday, information gathered from currency dealers in Abuja revealed.

At the parallel market segment, the dollar exchanged at N825.00 in Abuja on Tuesday as against N805.00 and above traded on Monday, dealers at the Abuja Zone 4 market said.

In recent months, the naira

has seen a significant decline across the official and unofficial forex market segments amid plans by the government to unify the nation's multiple exchange rates and scrap the petrol subsidy regime r-centric innovations with strong transactional and digital capabilities supported by sound risk management practises to anticipate and creatively deliver products and services that delight the different customer segments that we serve,"

Commenting on this feat, CEO of the First Bank Limited, Adesola Adeduntan, described the feat as "the strongest financial performance in the almost 130 years of the Bank's history."



FCCPC bemoans exploitation in food pricing

JOY OBAKEYE

The Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Agency (FCCPC) has said, one of the major cause of food crises in Nigeria is the fact that the vulnerables are exploiting the vulnerables as some market men and women were not considerate when it comes pricing.

Speaking during a multi-stakeholders workshop on fair food prices in Nigeria in collaboration with Consumers International recently in Lagos, the executive vice chairman of FCCPC, Babatunde Irukera disclosed that, the topic is very important because even the president recently declared a state of emergency on food security.

According to him, while it's a known fact that, climate change and the war between Russia and Ukraine has caused serious problem to global food production, factors in the value chain are even a bigger issue.

For instance, he said, farmers in Nigeria are poor,

consumers in Nigeria are also poor, noting that, if the farmers and the end users are poor, then something is actually wrong and that's what's the regulators have to take a drastic action against.

The FCCPC boss further disclosed that, the commission understands the position of the trade associations in Nigeria which is to promote commerce and not to destroy it, stressing that, trade associations in Nigeria have formed a cartel where in most cases, they fix price which they do not have the legal right to do.

He said the legislation instruments to checkmate this abnormally exist, but, why they have not been achieving results to that effect could be lack of strategy which, the regulators with the support of the consumes, must achieve.

On her part, project specialist, Consumers International, Miss Davine Minayo, said: "every four years Consumers International's Global Congress brings together the consumer movement and leading cross-sector influencers to tackle pressing issues impacting consumers worldwide."

According to her, fair food prices is a Consumers International project that's going on across the continents of the world with objective of knowing what government is doing to protect consumers from exploitation.

Also speaking at the event, representative of traders association of Nigeria, Ayo Abiola who is the managing director of Burke Frazier Consulting Firm LTD, said that, its a shame that prices of goods are going down across the world while its not the same in Nigeria.

Abiola, who was a member of the panel discussion, disagreed that traders are not responsible for food crisis in Nigeria, adding that, miscreants on the roads, multiple taxations among other factors, are responsible for the hike in prices of commodities across the country.

While proffering solution to the problem, executive director, Consumer Advocacy and Empowerment Found (CADEF) said, one of the ways of solving this problem is turning your backyard to farm so that so many people will be involved in food production.

Lafarge Africa seeks SON approval for Roadcem

Motolani Oseni

Lafarge Africa Plc, has initiated the process for regulatory approval of brand name Road cem by Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON) under the MANCAP certification scheme.

Classic brand of CEM II BL 32.5R grade of cement is certified by SON under the MANCAP scheme. Roadcem brand is the same grade of cement as Classic brand however, it is sold to two different sets of customers in these two different brand names.

According to the firm, Roadcem, as a brand name, is sold to road construction companies in bulk as a soil stabilizer for road construction, while classic as a brand name is sold in bags to the general public.

Speaking on this development, Group Managing Director/CEO of Lafarge Africa, Lolu Alade-Akinyemi, commended SON for the valuable role it plays in enforcing internationally acceptable standards of product quality in Nigeria.

He noted that the vigilance and professionalism of SON constitutes an immeasurable contribution to the Nigerian economy as it fosters consumer confidence in a wide variety of consumer and industrial goods.

He explained that as part of the building solutions giant, Holcim, which has operations in over 70 countries, strict compliance to international and local regulations is highly valued by all Lafarge Africa executives and employees.

He commented that Lafarge is very appreciative and proud of the cordial and productive relations it has enjoyed with SON over the years.

According to Alade-Akinyemi: "This is a key moment in Lafarge's journey in innovation and leadership in the Nigerian built and construction industry and brings us a step closer to making available a quality product that can help improve road construction in the country."

"We are continuously pushing the boundaries of innovation in order to shape the future of construction in a way that builds progress for people and the planet. It therefore gives us great pride to produce an important material that gives excellent value to the industry,"

headed. "At Lafarge we believe that the key to successfully build a world-class sustainable road network will require the adoption of innovation (innovative ways of working), as best practice now dictates the use of specialist binders in the soil stabilization process." He said.

Lafarge Road Cem has been designed and developed with the intent to stabilize and improve the physical and mechanical properties of soil in road construction. It offers road project contractors a choice of reliable, quality performance product, which provide the optimum solution to their soil stabilization requirements.

26% discount in emerging markets: Is it enough reason to invest?

STORIES BY
GODWIN ANYEBE

There's no doubt about the fact that the Emerging Markets (EM) look appealing, as they are cheaper than developed markets on a number of measures with their economies predicted to grow faster. However, the value of investments and the income from them, can go down as well as up, so you may get back less than you invest.

Analysis by professional

In the Fidelity asset management business suggests that companies in EM countries are at an unusually cheap level. On one measure - the comparison of share prices against the estimated value of company assets, known as price-to-book - EM companies haven't been this cheap compared to developed markets since 2002.

When comparing share prices to company earnings, another valuation measure known as the p/e ratio, the discount is 26 per cent compared to developed markets.

A more sophisticated measure known as CAPE, or the cyclically adjusted price-to-earnings ratio, is at 11,



some 19 per cent below the 15-year average¹, according to Schroders. Some investors believe this measure is more reliable as it smooths out the effects of economic cycles.

In short, there is a blizzard of numbers that suggest EM is cheap - but is there a catalyst for revaluation?

The benefit of having younger populations to drive stronger economic growth is often trailed as a reason for optimism, with the trend particularly strong in India

and South-East Asia. EM economies are forecast to grow faster than Europe and the US, with Asia paving the way.

The continent is estimated to generate 70 per cent of global growth this year.

EM economies may also be more resilient compared to previous cycles. They typically have less dollar-denominated debt, which has caused problems in recent years amid dollar surges, and they have more significant foreign exchange

reserves.

Interestingly, central banks in emerging markets were ahead of the curve in raising interest rates. It's a stark difference to the UK where sticky inflation remains an issue.

For most investors, exposure to EM can be achieved through a general EM fund. Some funds and ETFs offer a focus on single countries, a far riskier choice than a broader fund.

Starting with the largest country, there is optimism with China's

economy reopening, although its recovery may not be linear.

Tom Stevenson encapsulated the mood perfectly in his latest market news. "China has struggled to emerge from its Covid lockdowns with anything like the vigour it needs to deliver the five per cent annual growth that Beijing has targeted," he said.

Still, it's not all gloom. Chinese households accumulated \$1.5 trillion of excess savings during the country's zero Covid policy. Whether this will spur growth remains to be seen.

High commodity prices are also helping countries with relatively large mining industries, such as South Africa, Mexico and Brazil. There's a positive outlook for commodity prices over the long-term. Keep your eye on decarbonisation efforts, which is set to drive prices higher - clean energy technologies are commodity intensive.

Risks like populism and inflation are often priced into EM. Still, investors are trading carefully. The market is cautious of geopolitical risk which among emerging markets still exists.

Geopolitics is also having an impact through what has been "near-shoring" - companies choosing to relocate operations to countries closer to and perceived to be lower risk, also called "friend-shoring".

Apple moving its

manufacturing to India and Tesla moving its factories to Mexico are just two well-known examples. Vietnam and Indonesia are also expected to benefit.

The consequence of depressed valuations is showing up in some high-quality companies.

One startling example is a comparison between US chipmaker and AI leader Nvidia's and Taiwan chipmaker TSMC. Nvidia's share price has soared, driven by AI hype, by around 100 per cent over the past year, pushing it to a p/e multiple of over 200 times by the end of June. By contrast, TSMC has been broadly flat over the same period, and has a p/e multiple of 15 times.

Nvidia outsources the manufacturing of its chips to companies like TSMC and could not exist without it, making the difference in performance even more surprising.

This is largely due to the market's perception of geopolitical risk, rather than any fundamental issues with TSMC's business.

The additional risks of investing in EM, which have been historically volatile, should be carefully considered in the context of your portfolio. If you're curious to find out more, Fidelity's Select 50 list of favourite funds caters for investors seeking EM income or growth via four actively managed funds, two ETFs and an investment trust.

Why you must be resilient to survive, strengthen your business

In the ever-evolving world of business, entrepreneurs and small business owners face many challenges on their way to success.

But against all odds, with the right mindset and the right tools, you can build and grow your business.

To this end, First Bank hosts SMEConnect webinar, an event designed to help business owners harness the power of resilience in today's unpredictable economy.

The goal of this webinar is to provide practical strategies and insights to help individuals and organizations cope with uncertainty and emerge stronger from it. Whether you are an established business owner or an up-and-coming entrepreneur, this webinar will provide you with valuable knowledge and practical techniques to succeed in difficult times.

One of the webinar's focuses is building personal resilience. Participants will learn how to develop a resilient mindset that allows them to overcome obst-

acles, bounce back from failure, and maintain a positive attitude in the face of adversity.

Through experts guidance and real-world examples, participants can gain the tools they need to develop their own resilience and use it as an engine of success.

In addition, the webinar will cover promoting resilience within your organization. Entrepreneurs will discover effective strategies to build resilient cultures within their organizations and enable teams to adapt, innovate and persevere to challenges. Promoting a resilient work environment, business-essence can increase employee engagement, improve problem-solving skills, and ultimately drive sustainable growth.

This SMEConnect webinar by FirstBank is a platform for entrepreneurs and small business owners to come together, learn from industry experts and connect with like-minded peers

This provides a unique opportunity to gain insights,

share experiences and network with other executives who have faced similar hurdles on their entrepreneurial journey.

To ensure attendees get the most value from the webinar, FirstBank offers exclusive offers, discounts, and other incentives for early-registered attendees. This is a not-to-be-missed opportunity to expand your business and explore new growth opportunities. If you're ready to take your business to the next level and learn how resilience can be a game-changer in today's unpredictable economy, click the link provided to join the SMEConnect webinar. Please register here. Don't miss your chance to equip yourself with the knowledge and tools to build and grow your business in the face of adversity.

Remember, success often comes to those who adapt, innovate, and persevere. Join us for an SMEConnect webinar and discover how resilience can be your secret weapon to achieve your business goals.

Strong US dollar slows economic growth in Nigeria, other emerging economies-IMF

The International Monetary Fund, IMF, has said the appreciation of the US dollar was affecting emerging market economies more adversely than developed ones, listing Nigeria, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Thailand, among others, as most affected.

In a blog post published recently, the IMF said the dollar, strengthening to a 20-year high in 2022, had major implications for the global economy.

It said for every 10 per cent of US dollar appreciation linked to global financial market forces, emerging market economies faced a gross domestic product, GDP, output decline of 1.9 per cent after one year.

"In emerging market economies, a 10 per cent US dollar appreciation, linked to global financial

market forces, decreases economic output by 1.9 per cent after one year, and this drag lingers for two and a half years.

"In contrast, the negative effects in advanced economies are considerably smaller in size, peaking at 0.6 per cent after one quarter and are largely gone in a year," the post read.

The IMF said in emerging market economies, the effects of the strong dollar spread via trade and financial channels.

It said the countries' real trade volumes declined more sharply, with imports dropping twice as much as exports.

The IMF said many emerging market economies also tended to suffer worsening credit availability, diminished capital inflows, tighter monetary policy on impact, and bigger stock-market

declines.

It also added that US dollar appreciations impact the current account, which captures the change in saving-investment balances of countries.

The IMF said in emerging market economies, the fear of letting the exchange rate fluctuate and lack of monetary policy accommodation magnified the increase in the current account.

The post read further: "As a share of gross domestic product, current account balances (saving minus investment) increase in both emerging market economies and smaller advanced economies, because of a depressed investment rate (there is no clear systematic response for saving). However, the effect is larger and more persistent for emerging market economies."

'Rejigging import tax will catalyze private-sector investments in renewable energy'

The Managing Director of the Rural Electrification Agency (REA), Engr. Salihijo Ahmad, in this interview discussed rising energy cost and the agency's efforts in making solar energy affordable for Nigerian households. Excerpts...

Solar energy is expensive in Nigeria due to the cost of components. What can be done to make it affordable for Nigerians?

Solar energy deployment is not cheap, generally, not just in Nigeria. However, local manufacturing and assembly of renewable energy components must be encouraged. We have equally been actively driving conversations on the removal of import tax on solar energy components, which is something the private sector has consistently agitated for. A disease of malaria you don't even want to look at.

Local content is, however, very important in our quest to improve the affordability of solar infrastructure in Nigeria. Generally, these technologies are becoming more affordable. This is why homeowners are able to pay for solar home systems and inverter systems for their homes and businesses.

How would the 2023 Electricity Act affect your grassroots electricity programme?

State governments have always been critical as far as rural electrification is concerned. As a matter of fact, in recent years, armed with the understanding of the pivotal role that state governments must continue to play to aid the accelerated deployment of off-grid solutions to the underserved and the underserved, we reinvigorated the relationship between the REA and the states.

The Nigeria Governors Forum has been magnanimous enough to guide these interactions and, through knowledge-driven workshops coordinated by the REA, we now have Focal Persons at the state level working closely with us.

These engagements, the local information, and data we have access to through the states as well as the quality feedback on the energy needs of communities within the states, are aiding our decision-making and strengthening our projects in terms of sustainability.

The recent 2023 Electricity Act, granting states the power to invest across the sector's value chain is very commendable and timely as this further strengthens the deployment of decentralized energy technologies, beyond the grid.

Across all the 774 LGAs in Nigeria, you find communities that are far from the grid and can only be enlivened through decentralized energy solutions.

The REA already has its footprint in all 36 states in Nigeria, we have tested business models, we have carried out pilots and we have equally deployed several functional, impactful decentralized energy solutions across the country.

This Act will improve these efforts, improve the electrification ecosystem and equally improve employment in the energy space, local manufacturing/assembly, and, ultimately enable the nation to improve energy access across the board. States are equally able to generate and distribute energy, even with the possibility to trade excess to the national grid.

How do you intend to streamline operations of firms coming to create a structured path to progress along policy guidelines?

The repositioned REA is actually functioning beyond just an implementing Agency of the Federal Government's off-grid electrification programmes.

The agency, in recent years, has strengthened its strategic partnerships with private sector players in terms of the quality of collaborations.

Together with the private sector, we have been exploring R&D, assessing business models, and aligning on sustainable funding channels and opportunities.

As you are aware, the REA is one agency that continues to leverage the power of PPP across all its programmes. So, we have a growing community of private sector players who continue to work in lockstep with the Agency, while

fully understanding the mandate and overarching objectives of the internal decisions we make.

Already, we have a growing portfolio of private-sector players who continue to key into our programmes through the Rural Electrification Fund (REA), the Nigeria Electrification Project (NEP) as well as other programmes and initiatives of the Agency.

How much cost can a household budget to have electricity via solar power adoption?

You will agree that the feedback on this question cannot be straightforward. This is why energy audits are done to systematically gauge usage culture and deploy the appropriate capacity for individual homes in urban areas.

At the REA, our focus area is not urban but rural. Usually, people who look to personally invest in solar energy often start with carrying out energy audits of their energy needs vis a vis their facilities in their homes as well as their usage culture, which now informs the type and capacity of technologies to be deployed.

These technologies vary and for the most part, cost varies per brand.

There are several PayGo players coming into the sector to provide these sort of services to cater to the energy needs of Nigerians. You therefore have tariff in various areas, energy efficiency etc as some of the factors.

What regulatory options would you like government to consider to promote, Fast Track deepening of renewable energy in the country?

There has been a lot of groundwork and solixisting regulatory instruments in the nation's energy sector. The plan is to continue to double down on implementation.

For example, the feed-in-tariffs can be rejigged to enable us to pull back more energy into the system. This will ultimately help the government to further



catalyze private-sector investments.

Do you have data showing how many Nigerians are without power?

Figures on energy access data are debatable. Information being mainstreamed in the space puts the number of unserved and underserved Nigerians with little or no access to electricity at over 80 million.

But we have to be mindful that this number might not necessarily have taken self-generation into consideration: looking at people who use different forms of generations or renewable energy solutions in their homes and businesses.

This figure is very most likely based on an estimate of Nigerians not being sufficiently served by the grid.

What has been your challenges?

Anywhere in the world, the business of electrification is a capital-intensive business. Especially considering the kind of energy gap we plan to close in Nigeria. So, yes, sustainable access to finance remains a

challenge. Why the Federal Government has been very forthcoming as far as providing the needed support and funding, this sector cannot be driven at its peak based solely on government funding.

This is why, for us, government funding serves as a Launchpad to prove business models as well as the impact of these technologies while we now draw in and leverage sustainable finance options and private sector investments to further strengthen the sector.

How do you attract private sector participation in this drive?

In reality, the Federal Government has been very deliberate as far as investor-friendly policies go. With Public Private Sector Partnership, PPP models, so much has been achieved in the off-grid sector.

At the REA, we continue to work in lockstep with private-sector players while maintaining an open-door policy for ideas, innovations and other knowledge-driven avenues to improve the sector. One of the ways we

draw in private sector participation under the Nigeria Electrification Project (NEP) for example is through the Performance-Based Grant and Result-Based Finance.

With such deliberate funding mechanisms already in place, the private sector developers are always ready and willing to access these grants to help drive our mandate while at the same time, strengthening their own businesses.

Private sector players need business environments that is predictable, devoid of bottlenecks, and where there is better coordination as well as a stable macro-economy.

The more they make these assessments, the more they increase their confidence in the ecosystem. We equally continue to hold knowledge-driven engagements with private sector players where we expose the bigger picture as well as our goals for the sector.

This is encouraging as it equally enables them to carry out their projections in line with our project pipeline.

Security of Benue people my topmost agenda in Senate - Senator Udende

HARUNA SALAMI,
Abuja

In this interview, Senator Emmanuel Menga Udende representing Benue North-East, who is a lawyer by profession, says the controversial Anti-open Grazing Law in the state will be strengthened by the current government by filling the observed gaps. He also spoke on insecurity in various parts of the country, unemployment, the recent allocation of N70 billion to the National Assembly, fuel subsidy removal and other national issues. Excerpts from HARUNA SALAMI.

What are some of the pressing issues in Benue North-East where you represent that you intend to bring to the attention of the National Assembly?

I have just two. First, is security. About three or four Local Governments are bedeviled with the issue of security. That is a very big problem for us, just like the North-West or North-East. This has been disturbing us for a very long time. It's an agenda for me in the Senate to try to see if we can tackle it.

You can notice that about two weeks ago, there was an attack in my own Local Government where about 24 people were killed by bandits. It's something that has been disturbing us. Since 2015 the military has been after these people, but very little has been achieved.

Our major aim is that at this time let's adopt a stick and carrot approach. Those ones that are moderate, let's talk to them. If they can lay down their arms, we integrate them back to the society and ask the military to go after those who are hardened. We are working on it. Recently Service Chiefs have been confirmed. It's the concern of my governor too. We are jointly working on it. We have set up a very small committee to give us modality on how to go about it. As soon as the committee gives the report, we will take the next step.

It's a very challenging situation; the economy of the place has gone down. People can no longer go to the farm. Before, it used to be Fulani herdsmen and in a bid to chase away the Fulani herdsmen, there is a problem internally

because the boys who were armed to chase these people have now turned their guns on the people.

So, it's a very big challenge. We are looking at it and, God willing, we will be able to sort out the issue.

The second one is unemployment. Generally, there is unemployment in the country with graduates from the university, polytechnic, roaming the streets. Now that I'm in the Senate to make laws, my proposals in the budget will be to areas that will alleviate this menace.

It's a very big problem, which, if not curbed, can take us into security challenge too. An idle hand can do anything.

It's my aim to have intervention that can really take some hands off from unemployment.

Before this time, the Benue State Government promulgated Anti-Open Grazing Law. **How do you assess its implementation?**

Well, I'm a lawyer by profession. I was called to Bar in 1986; that is a long time. I looked at the law. There are gaps, the implementation by the past administration was very poor. There is no desk officer. The first thing is to create a department in the Ministry of Agriculture that anybody who wants to breed animals could go there and ask for land. That will be better, but for now there is none.

We believe that this government will do something by creating a department in the Ministry of Agriculture that will enforce the implementation of this law. It was left for these livestock guards who most of the time will create problems, attack and carry cattle.

The Fulanis in trying to get the cattle back; once they come and the cattle are not complete, come back for revenge.

The innocent people suffer. I believe there should be a desk officer who you can approach if you want a ranch and there is an infringement; these can go after.

Do you foresee the present government coming up with an amendment to close these gaps?

I think so, because during the campaigns he (Governor) promised the people that he is going to strengthen the law. You can only strengthen the law if you fill gaps and then you are good to go.

Distinguished senator, to

solve any problem you must first get to the root of it. **Don't you think legislators should go to the root of the problem first?**

The root of the problem is that the farmer wants his land and the grazer wants to graze on the land. There must be some negotiation, not the law itself alone. Even as they fight in Ukraine now, they must come to negotiation table. The guns and whatever will never win the war. In this case too, the two sides must come to negotiation table and find a lasting solution to it. The law alone may not find the solution.

You defeated a former Governor and Senator to be here today. **How was the journey?**

I'm a Christian and if you are a Christian, go and read 1 Corinthians 1:27. It says "God chooses the less privileged to confound the wise, to make the wise look foolish". That is what God did in this case. I have nothing to say. It's just the grace of God that brought me here.

What has your experience been like since your inauguration?

Well, I have been in the National Assembly before. I was in the House of Representatives between 2011 to 2019. I'm in a familiar terrain, it's just a few changes; whereas in the House you don't debate Uninfrastructure Bill, here they debate it. In the House, once it is infrastructure motion, once you move it, then it is passed without argument. It makes the process very fast.

In the House, the Deputy Speaker presides in a committee of the whole, but here it is the Senate President who does it.

These are the few differences I have noticed; otherwise, it is the same thing. Committee on Rules and Business acts like the Attorney General in the House; here it is silence. The Leader drives it.

What are your expectations of the 10th National Assembly?

Like every individual, you will want to surpass your predecessors. Our expectation is that we will surpass the performance of the 9th National Assembly.

But from the beginning now people believe you are here to serve yourselves.

Many Nigerians see the N70 billion allocated to the National Assembly in the amendment to the 2022



Appropriation Act as being for your welfare?

No. You see, the problem with Nigerians -and I don't blame them because the world over, it is the legislator that takes the bashing -if you go to America, it's the same; they take the bashing for whatever privileges they have. Do you expect a minister...if they bring the list, the day they come here and they are sworn in, the ministry will provide working tools for them.

The N70 billion is to provide working vehicles for the National Assembly generally; it's not for the welfare of legislators. Very soon, once the committees are set up, we go into committees. It's not for welfare, like The Sun said. The Sun did the arithmetic and said N128 million each.

You see, we expect that where you don't understand, you ask. It is not palliative to National Assembly; it is for provision of vehicles for the working of the National Assembly, and not only the Senate, but for the House of Representatives too.

Right now there are no computers. Part of the money will go into buying office equipment for National Assembly generally and the other one will go into buying vehicles. **Don't we deserve to have working vehicles and working tools?**

What do you have to say about the removal of fuel subsidy?

For me, I'm a believer in the removal of fuel subsidy; it's (subsidy) a scam. The people that benefit from fuel subsidy are not you and I. See people in the oil sector that are benefiting. You can imagine

that the expenditure is about N400 billion monthly. Multiply that by 12 months. Now without the subsidy, I think consumption has been cut by 28 per cent. We were subsidizing not only Nigeria, but neighbouring countries, and that has stopped. I think it's good for us.

What I will advise the government to do in the interim is to provide palliatives that will bring succour to the man on the street. I won't agree let's go back to subsidy regime, rather I will prefer they subsidize agriculture where every man on the street will get food to eat. But subsidy for petroleum products, no. The few people that are benefiting, some of them present their bills, nobody to check. It is only NNPC that buys, you don't know how much they are buying.

They tell us they recoup whatever expenditure they have made. I think the President has done well by removing the subsidy. Everybody should support him. No matter the hardship, it will be temporary. We believe the prices will come down once we allow market forces to play.

Some people are of the view that instead of palliatives, why not use the money build a refinery and solve this problem once and for all?

My biggest problem is that we have four refineries, but they are not working. The problem is not even building refinery. If we don't want the ones we have, sell them to private individuals who can manage them. Since we cannot fix existing ones there is no need building new ones. I don't subscribe to building new refineries.



PEPC: APC plotting to undermine judiciary - Atiku

...says plot will undermine democracy, puts Nigerians, international community on alert

TUNDE OPALANA,
Abuja



As proceedings at the Presidential Election Petition Court (PEPC) move towards a crescendo, presidential candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar, has raised the alarm that there have been threats from the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) to intimidate the judiciary from serving the course of justice.

The former Vice President said it is regrettable that the APC and, indeed, agents of President Bola Tinubu, have ceaselessly chosen to stand in the way of justice by making what he described as catastrophic threats to anarchy, if justice is not served according to their whims.

A statement by his media adviser, Paul Ibe at the weekend, described

reports in the media about some heinous plots to harass Judges sitting on the petition as ominous to peace and the security of the nation.

He attributed a claim that the election that brought the current government into office is the worst in the annals of democratic politics in the country, as reason why he and other parties in the election have chosen the patriotic path to challenge the outcome of that election at the petitions court.

He said: "It is a truism that the judiciary is the only reasonable option in the quest for justice. As a matter of fact, our judiciary and the interpretations that they have given to our laws have been a major building block in our democratic journey so far.

"Our laws are very clear about the prerequisite of separation of powers as a guarantee of an independent judiciary.

"The idea behind that concept of an independent judiciary is to insulate that branch of government from unholy fraternity between its hallowed members and the rest of the society - especially the political actors.

"But as proceedings on the controversial February 25 election continue at the court, there have been threats from the ruling party

that aim to intimidate the judiciary from serving the duty of justice.

"It is regrettable that the APC and, indeed, agents of President Bola Tinubu have ceaselessly chosen to stand in the way of justice by making catastrophic threats to anarchy if justice is not served according to their whims.

"These and reports in the media about some heinous plots to harass justices sitting on the petition are ominous to peace and the security of our nation.

"Our democracy gives the people of Nigeria the powers to choose their leaders, and our laws demand that our judiciary must be allowed to act independently without harassment and intimidation by the government or powerful interests.

"To compromise the workings of our democracy and seeking to compromise the workings of our judiciary is an open call for anarchy," said Atiku.

As a party in the litigation that is currently reviewing the outcome of the last presidential election, he said his intention is to do all that is within the law to resist any attempt to undermine Nigeria's fragile democracy.

Alerting the international community, the PDP candidate said: "Indeed, we are using this channel to call on the international community to be alerted.

"Nigeria's democracy should not be undermined by using the judiciary to serve the interest of the ruling party.

"Sadly, this has become the stock in trade of the All Progressives Congress to intimidate the judiciary.

"Recall that in 2019, the APC-led Federal Government similarly removed the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Walter Onnoghen,

when it was obvious that he would not bend to their will.

"The Department of State Services similarly stormed the homes of judges in 2016 and 2017, all in a bid to beat the judiciary into submission.

"The plot of the APC is simple: intimidate the judiciary, threaten judges with arrest so that they will bow to their will. This is a playbook from 2019 when they removed the CJN and then replaced him with Tanko Muhammad, who himself was later accused of corruption by his colleagues at the Supreme Court and resigned shamefully.

"However, the APC government never went after Tanko Muhammad as they did in Onnoghen's case because it was never about corruption but election.

The APC has, over the years, built a reputation of judiciary intimidation. They accused about 10 judges of corruption, stormed their homes, and got them suspended and yet could not convict a single of them. Justice Sylvester Ngwuta of the Supreme Court could not recover from the embarrassment that he ended up dying in office.

"Now, they have initiated a new plot. This time around, they want to intimidate the judges into delivering favourable judgments for them at the election tribunal. We draw the attention of the international community and, indeed, Nigerians to this fresh plot to steal the mandate of over 200 million people.

"We are also urging Nigerians to abide by the golden rule of eternal vigilance being the price of liberty." Atiku also appealed to all security agencies in the country to remain professional in the discharge of their duties and resist being used as an instrument of oppression and intimidation against the judiciary.

Kalu calls for greater economic partnerships, free movement across Africa

...expresses Nigeria's readiness to support AU candidate, Ackson for IPU president

TOM OKPE,
Abuja

Deputy Speaker of House of Representatives, Rep Benjamin Kalu has called for greater economic partnerships and co-operation amongst the 54 Africa countries.

He stressed that the artificial boundaries that impede free movement of people and goods should be removed.

The deputy speaker made the call when he received the Speaker of East Africa Legislative Assembly, Joseph Ntakirutimana who paid him a courtesy visit in company with the Speaker of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Parliament, Sidie Mohamed Tunis and a member of Tanzania's Parliament, Mlozi Shogo Richard.

Kalu urged parliaments of various countries in Africa to review their laws impeding economic growth and free movement of people.

He also condemned the xenophobic attacks in some parts of Africa, saying that it stalls unity and progress.

He said: "If you're part of African Union, why the boundaries?

Why the restrictions? The restrictions have underdeveloped the continent more than it has lifted it to measure shoulder to shoulder among the comity of continents.

"These, we must take seriously and this message we must take to all our countries' Parliaments for a review of our various positions on this issue.

"I'm happy to announce that the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, has been made Chairman of ECOWAS. We will give all the support that's expected to make him succeed in his tenure as the Chairman of ECOWAS and that includes the Parliament."

The Speaker of ECOWAS expressed, in his speech, the need to retool the ECOWAS Parliament, saying: "We need to review the mechanism used so far by our nations' interest in the Parliament.

"We need to revisit that, so we can stimulate more interest and more motivation that will no longer stall the speed of ECOWAS Parliament, towards realizing the continental objective of setting up the ECOWAS parliament.

We are all one people and we must take steps to reinforce that unity. With unity, we can deal with present challenges which manifest in transnational violence, coup threats

in some sub-Saharan African countries, slowing economic growth, climate change, and human trafficking especially in Sahelian Africa.

"We must not allow this to fester in the near future.

"After the Berlin Conference that started in 1884 and ended in 1885, Africa has never been the same especially due to artificial boundaries and the negative consequences of colonialism meted on the continent.

"We in Africa are at a precarious time to correct these defects and consequences of that conference," he stated.

He also said commencement of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a step in the right direction.

"There is no reason why Africans should not trade and travel freely within Africa as is the case for Europeans in the European Union.

"Parliament, in all circumstances, includes legislation and timely diplomatic overtures and this friendly visit is a good example of what we should be doing.

Pan-African parliamentary organizations must encourage the people and work collectively towards one purpose. They must take deliberate steps to work on immigration laws and trade laws so as

to encourage free trade and movement. This will ultimately lead to closer ties and the fulfillment of intra-African trade," he added.

Kalu stated that the Nigerian House of Representatives will support the candidacy of Dr Tulia Ackson for the President of Inter-parliamentary Union, (IPU), asking to make her manifesto known to lawmakers.

"I believe one day there will be a platform where we would all come together as one continent, as one nation, divided by the boundaries created by interests best known to those who divided us to speak with one voice. The voice of Africa.

"We are one people. We must not allow this to fester in the near future. I don't know whether this is part of the dreams of the speaker of Tanzania who wants to be the President of the IPU. These are dear to our hearts, we will encourage you; when you go back, inform her.

"We need to get to know more about her manifesto, what she's taking to Inter-parliamentary union. The need to engage the biggest parliament in Africa cannot be over emphasized, we don't want to be

recorded as those who didn't support one of our own but we need to understand her vision to the IPU."

Earlier, the speaker of ECOWAS parliament, Tunis emphasized the need for Africa's integration.

He also hailed Nigeria for her contributions to ECOWAS.

"Nigeria is the country, leading the region. Like I told the Speaker of EALA in my office today, Nigeria in ECOWAS is like United States in UN. The bulk of our budgetary support comes from Nigeria. That's why we don't allow them to even get upset. When they get upset, we will begin to catch cold.

In her remarks, the member of Tanzania parliament, Richard appealed to Nigerian parliament to support Ackson for IPU presidency.

"Dr Tulia Ackson is a Member of the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania. She joined the National Assembly in the year 2015, and since then, she has been attending series of meetings in IPU and she has had the opportunity to understand the vision and mission of the IPU. She as well understands the role of IPU in the World," she stated.

APC National Chairman: Lukman faults PGF endorsement of Ganduje

...says Govs should serve as conscience of APC

TOM OKPE,
Abuja

The All Progressives Congress, (APC) National Vice Chairman, North-West, Salihu Moh' Lukman has faulted endorsements by the Progressives Governors' Forum, (PGF) of former Governor of Kano State, Dr Abdullahi Umar Ganduje as National Chairman of the ruling party.

Lukman also said the party's governors should rather, see themselves as conscience of the party, stating that endorsing a candidate for the highest position in the party is unfair to both President Bola Ahmed

Tinubu and other leaders of the party who are not members of PGF.

Recall that the National Chairman, Senator Abdul-lahi Adamu and the National

Secretary, Iyiola Omisore resigned their positions respectively in what the PGF described as resignation on 'Personal Conviction'.

The former Director General, PGF, Lukman in a letter addressed to the Forum's Chairman and Governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma on Sunday with copies to President Bola Tinubu, Members of APC National Working Committee, (NWC) and Dr Ganduje explained that; "It's quite troubling that Progressive Governors Forum, (PGF) under Your Excellency's leadership is being reported to have decided on adopting Dr Abdullahi Umar Ganduje to become the next National Chairman of APC."

He said: "While it is within the right of Progressive Governors being a very critical power bloc within the

APC to endorse any candidate for the position of National Chairman, to make such decision public, in whatever manner, is unfair to both President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and other leaders of the party who are not members of PGF.

"It is even unfair to Dr Ganduje who is being endorsed."

He further stressed that having served PGF between August 2013 and February 2022 as Director General, he remains conversant with conventional approach towards managing consultations between the Forum and the party.

"I am fully conversant with conventional approach towards managing consultations between PGF and the party.

"Whenever PGF is privileged to reach agreement with the President, being the party leader, on matters affecting the party, PGF takes neces-

ary steps to first meet with the NWC or, at the least, the National Chairman.

"Where such decisions require pronouncement by organs of the party, PGF uses its influence within the party to negotiate the buy-in of members of the relevant organs. That has been the tradition.

"As a member of NWC, I feel highly slighted that I am only encountering such endorsement in the media.

Coming shortly after the resignation of Senators Abdullahi Adamu and Iyiola Omisore as National Chairman and National Secretary respectively who were accused of undermining organs of the party, it raises questions as to whether PGF under your leadership share the commitment to restore constitutional

order in APC and return the party to its founding vision.

"Given the implication of such endorsement in terms of being unjust and unfair to the North Central region and given that the position of the National Chairman is zoned to North Central, based on which zoning for leadership of National Assembly was decided, it simply suggest that the PGF has deviated from its traditional role of acting as the conscience of the party.

"If PGF is to act as the conscience of the party, even if assuming as it is being promoted in the public that the endorsement is coming from President Tinubu, the PGF I know would have taken every step to convince the President otherwise and if the President insisted, they would have shielded the President by owning the

decision.

"But to handle the endorsement in the way it appears in the public is unfair to President Asiwaju Tinubu and unfair to Dr Ganduje who is being alleged to have put so much pressure on the President, which is not true.

"I want to strongly appeal to the PGF Chairman to kindly return PGF to its conventional role of acting as the conscience of the party by ensuring that the party always takes right decisions, which will protect interest of every member, region and all interest.

"The PGF under Your Excellency's leadership must not be seen to be promoting or condoning decisions that are liable to acts of injustice and unfairness to any member, section of the country or interest," he added.

I'm a believer in fuel subsidy; removal - Senator Udende

HARUNA SALAMI,
Abuja

The Senator representing Benue North East, Emmanuel Udende has said he is a firm believer in the fuel subsidy removal by President Bola Tinubu describing the exercise as "a scam".

Speaking with Daily Times on the topic, which has brought a lot of hardship on Nigerians, Udende said the people that benefit from fuel subsidy are not ordinary Nigerians, but people in the oil sector.

He said one can imagine that the expenditure is about N400 billion monthly, which if multiply that by 12 months is mind bugging adding that "now without the subsidy, I think consumption has been cut by 28 per cent".

"We were subsidizing, not only Nigeria, but neighbouring countries, and that has stopped. I think it's good for us".

He advised the government, in the interim, to provide palliatives that will bring succour to the man on the street, adding that he won't agree that the country goes back to subsidy regime.

In the alternative, Udende preferred the government subsidise agriculture "where every man on the street will get food to eat". But subsidy for petroleum products, no.

"The few people that are benefiting, some of them present their bills, nobody to check. It is only NNPC that buys, you don't know how much they are buying.

According to him, the President has done well by removing the subsidy, urging everybody to support him because "no matter the hardship, it will be temporal. We believe the prices will come down once we allow market forces to play".

On the view of some people that instead of

palliatives, the government should use the money to build a refinery and solve this problem once and for all, Udende said the fact that the four government refineries are not working has rendered the argument useless.

"My biggest problem is that we have four refineries, but they are not working" adding "the problem is not even building refinery. If we don't want the ones we have, sell them to private individuals who can manage them".

He said since we cannot fix existing ones there is no need building new ones. "I don't subscribe to building new refineries", he said.



We won't relax on tribunal, ready for 2027 election –NNPP candidate Promises NUJ continuous support

STEPHEN GBADAMOSI,
Ibadan

Candidate of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) in the Ogun State governorship election, Ambassador Olufemi Ajadi Oguntoyinbo, who was honoured as a patron of the Correspondents' chapel of the Oyo State Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) on Sunday, has said the NNPP will continue with its petition over the poll.

Oguntoyinbo, shortly after delivering a lecture entitled; "Contesting in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections: Ogun State Experience," spoke with journalist thereafter and said the party would see the case filed before the tribunal to the end, despite that a senior advocate of Nigeria (SAN) hired to prosecute the case collected mobilisation fees and refused to represent.

He said the party was mobilising to have more members to have a better showing in the next elections in 2027.

"We are sure that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) did not do the right thing in the 2023 election in Ogun State. We are contending that and we don't think of withdrawing.

"We are solidifying our membership base in the NNPP. We are going to be the party to beat in 2007; and we are trying to make that happen. My belief in this country is strong. I have said times without number that the kind of change the late Obafemi Awolowo made in politics in made me love to join politics," he said.

Earlier in his lecture, Oguntoyinbo highlighted the intrigues that characterised the Nigerian electoral process, citing how so-

called money bags hijacked the process and disenfranchised people who wished to serve.

He also talked about institutionalized means of subverting the wish of the people as he witnessed in the Ogun State example.

Leaders of the profession who were there were the state chairman, Chief Demola Babalola; Correspondents' chairman (host), Muftau Raji Adebayo; Adebayo Akamo, Kemi Olaitan, among others.

Other dignitaries at the lecture included a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), a former Chief Press Secretary to the late Governor Lam Adesina, Alhaji Kehinde Olaosebikan; another former Oyo CPS and former NUJ chairman, Mr. Victor Oluwadamilare; NNPP chieftans from Ogun State and many journalists.

APC insists, no crisis in party, stands united in quest for more progress

TOM OKPE,
Abuja

The All Progressives Congress, (APC) has insisted there is no crisis in the party stressing it's rather, standing more united in quest for greater Progress in the party and the country.

Barr Felix Morka, National Publicity Secretary of the party said in Abuja on Sunday that recent events in the party, notably, resignation of the National Chairman, Senator Abdullahi Adamu and National Secretary, Iyiola Omisore has led some to suggest that the Party is in some kind of crisis.

He said incipient

conversations and rumors regarding their possible successors have equally fueled false narratives of deepening crisis in the Party.

"Quite to the contrary, there is no crisis in the Party. APC stands as one strong, dynamic, resilient and progressive Party.

The resignations under reference only show the high level of institutional maturity and quality of its leadership that place the best interest of the Party first and above personal egos and ambitions.

"The rapid and seamless succession, in acting capacities, to both offices exemplifies the cogency of its

constitutional processes."

The NPS also said trending reports in sections of the media suggesting disharmony among members of the National Working Committee, (NWC) or between the NWC and other critical sections of the Party's leadership around possible successor to the office of National Chairman are purely speculative.

"All sections of the Party's college of leadership stand united in quest for a more progressive Party.

"While individual Party leaders and members retain their right to express their personal thoughts and opinions, they do not represent the official

position of the NWC or the Party.

"Official position of the NWC on the subject of succession to any vacant offices of the NWC or any other subject will be communicated via the official channels of the NWC.

"Change in the life of any individual or institution is constant and inevitable. As Africa's largest political Party, our demonstrated capacity to adapt to change and emergent realities always stands us out, and sets us beyond the wishes of doomsayers.

"We remain committed to the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Administration towards uplifting the quality of life of all Nigerians."

Why legislative arm needs to cooperate with Gov. Otti, member reveals

EMEKA OKAFOR,
Umuahia



Member representing Umuahia Central State Constituency, Hon. Anthony Chinasa elected under the Labour Party, LP, has disclosed why members of the State House of Assembly should give support to Governor Alex Otti in his quest to achieve his campaign promises.

Speaking to the Weekend Times in Umuahia, Hon. Chinasa also called Abiola by his teeming supporters whose constituency covers the capital city recalled that Governor Otti had during his campaign promised to build a new face of Abia while describing him as man with large vision.

"In that line, we the legislature will have the same vision and cue into it. Umuahia is strategically located being the State capital which has a city centre and if it allowed to remain the same, it then simply means that what we promised the people is not what we are implementing".

He assured that the current palliative measure going on around the city centre is to return sanity and orderliness " The city centre will wear a new face entirely and it would look like a capital of a State.

"I was not elected into the House to clap my hands as if I am in the Church or sing praises, so, when I am inside the hallowed chambers I am their to be the voice for my constituents and assist the Executive arm get it right".

the series of events lined up for the birthday anniversary, where Prof. Toyin Ogundipe, the former VC of University of Lagos will be Guest Lecturer.

Also, governors of Ekiti and Lagos States, HE Babajide Sanwo-Olu (CON) and HE Biodun Oyebanji will co-host the event, while the Senate President HE Godswill Obot Akpabio (CON) is the Chief Host.

Also, His Excellency, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (GCFR) and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and

Senate Leader, Bamidele unveils books on leadership to mark 60th birthday

TUNDE OPALANA,
Abuja

Senate Majority Leader, Michael Opeyemi Bamidele will tomorrow, Tuesday 25th of July, 2023, unveil two books in commemoration of his 60th birthday anniversary.

The two-term senator representing Ekiti Central Senatorial District on the platform of All Progressives Congress (APC) personally wrote the books in two volumes with the title:

"Leadership Through Communication" (Volu-

mes 1 & 2) in his erudite efforts to dissect the social, political and economic events which gave birth to the current Fourth Republic in retrospect to independence era.

According to a statement Sunday from the Senate Leader Media Office, the first volume of the book which comes in 406 pages and 14 chapters addresses how to actualise development at grassroots through information and strategy, advocating rights of the poor in the society, ending want in the midst of plenty and

maintaining integrity in public office.

In a foreword written by Prof. Adeyemi Isumonah of Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan; he said "Senator Bamidele's book is an overview of major processes of leadership and development with a pointed message for major stakeholders in society".

This volume also talks about Lagos Mega City and global economic meltdown, government and media relations in Lagos; where the Senate Leader cut his teeth in politics under the able tutorship of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu then as Governor of Lagos State.

It is on record that Senator Bamidele served in various capacities which include two-term commissioner, Special Adviser and Special Assistant in government of Lagos State proudly regarded as one of the largest economies on the continent and the commercial nerve entre of Nigeria.



GTI boss congratulates new NPL board members

The GMD of GTI Asset Management & Trust Limited, Abubakar Lawal, has officially congratulated the newly appointed board members of the Nigeria Premier League Ltd (NPL) by the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF).

Lawal revealed this in a press statement made available to journalists in Lagos on Friday and assured the new board members of the willing-ness of his company as a strategic partner to work closely in ensuring the development of the Nigerian elite league.

He also thanked the NFF for returning some members of the then Interim Management Committee (IMC) of the elite league to the new board to ensure the continuity of the NPL project.

"On behalf of the management and staff of GTI Asset Management & Trust Limited, I want to congratulate the newly appointed board members, toge-

ther we shall all take the NPFL to greater heights.

"We are strengthened by the quality of officials named on the new board and GTI is ready and committed to work with them such that the elite league will enjoy positive development and quality decision-making.

"It is the hope of GTI that all hands must be on deck now to actualize the huge burden we have on our shoulders in order to reposition and restructure our elite league such that it ranks among the best globally," Lawal said.

However, GTI's Executive Director, Nelson Ine who also doubles as Project Director of TNFF has welcomed the newly appointed board members and urged them to work closely with the company to ensure that the set-out goals for the NPFL's development are actualized in no distant future.

Ine confirmed that the upcoming NPFL



2023/2024 season will witness a huge boost as GTI is neck-deep in bringing on board quality partners who will help take the elite league to the next level.

He added that very soon the company will officially unveil some partners/sponsors for the NPFL before the commencement of the new season as discussions are ongoing in that regard.

Meanwhile, the NFF on Thursday constituted the board of the Nigeria Premier League (NPL) with former chairman of the Interim Management Comm-

ittee (IMC), Hon. Gbenga Elegbeleye, as chairman of the board.

Others are Mallam Mohammed Nasiru Sa'idu (Member); Barr Poubeni Ogun (Member); Mr Daniel Amokachi (Member); Dr Okey Kpalukwu (Member); Mallam Suleiman Umar (Member) and Mr Dominic Iorfa (Member).

The Secretary/Legal Adviser is Barr Danlami Ibrahim while the Chief Operating Officer is Prince Davidson Owumi. The new NPL board according to NFF has two-year tenure.

Delta gov mourns sports legend, Awoture Eleyae

NOSA ÀKEÑZUA,
Asaba

Governor Sheriff Oborevwori of Delta State has sent condolences to the family of the Late Dr. Awoture Eleyae, former Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Sports in Africa.

The Late Pa Eleyae, who died at the age of 96, hailed from Uzere in Isoko South Local Government Area of the state.

In a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Sir Festus Ahon, Oborevwori described the Late Eleyae as a sports scholar and administrator par excellence, whose contributions to the growth and development of sports in Nigeria and Africa would not be forgotten.

Governor Oborevwori commended the Late Eleyae for his role in strengthening sports administration in the country, saying that he left behind an indelible mark on the trajectory of the development of the country.

He said that the Late Eleyae, who designed the National Institute for Sports (NIS), became its first Principal from 1975 to 1984.

"As National Chief

Track and Athletics Coach, the Late Eleyae captained the Nigerian Basketball Team to the first All African Games in 1965 and led the Nigerian team as athletics coach to several Olympics.

"He was Acting Director-General, National Sports Commission, and later became the Chair-man, Bendel State Sports Council, and Chairman, National Sports Award Committee.

"On behalf of the Government and people of Delta State, I condole the entire Eleyae Family, the people of Uzere Kingdom, Isoko Nation and the global sports community on the passing of the legendary Dr Awoture Eleyae.

"The Dr Awoture Eleyae Athletics Championship in Delta State, instituted in his honour, has continued to produce great athletes, including Ese Brume, Divine Oduduru, Usheoritse Itse-kiri and Raymond Ekevwo, among others," the governor said.

Oborevwori prayed for the repose of the soul of the departed and for his family, the Uzere people and Isoko Nation, the fortitude to bear the loss.

Newcastle sign England's Barnes from Leicester City for £38m

Newcastle United have signed England winger Harvey Barnes from Leicester City for a fee of about £38m.

The 25-year-old, capped once by England, has signed a five-year contract with the Magpies.

He is the club's third signing of the summer following the arrivals of forward Yankuba Minteh and Italian international midfielder Sandro Tonali.

"I think it's an attacker's dream to come

into a team like this," Barnes said.

"I'm delighted. It's an amazing club and for me it's a massive opportunity to come and be involved in a successful team that's doing exciting things, so I'm absolutely buzzing to be here."

Newcastle finished fourth in the Premier League last season and in 2023-24 will be playing in the Champions League for the first time since 2003-04.

"Harvey is an exciting talent who I have admired for a

long time so I'm delighted to welcome him to Newcastle United," said Newcastle head coach Eddie Howe.

"He is strong, quick and very good technically, and he showed last season in particular that he has an eye for goal from wide positions."

Barnes is the latest player to leave the Foxes after their relegation from the Premier League.

He made 146 Premier League appearances for Leicester,

scoring 35 goals and creating 25 assists.

Despite scoring 13 league goals in 2022-23, he could not save them from dropping into the Championship.

His departure comes after James Maddison moved to Tottenham in a £40m deal, while fellow midfielder Youri Tielemans and defender Caglar Soyuncu left on free transfers, joining Aston Villa and Atletico Madrid respectively.



Jamaica aimed to 'shock world' after France draw - Spence



Jamaica, ranked 43rd in the world, are making their second appearance at a Women's World Cup, having become the first Caribbean team to qualify for the tournament at the 2019 edition.

However, their journey to Australia and New Zealand has been marred by the players' battle with their own federation, leading to "utmost disappointment" within the camp.

In an open letter, the Reggae Girlz called for "immediate and systematic change" within the Jamaica Football Federation (JFF).

Jamaica had lost their previous three matches at a Women's World Cup before the draw with France

They said they missed official matches because of "extreme disorganisation" and have not "contractually agreed upon compensation".

The players also claimed to have sat down

with the JFF "on multiple occasions" to express their concerns, but "questions go unanswered and concerns unresolved".

So when the final whistle blew in Sydney, in front of 39,000 fans, Jamaica's players celebrated in style, running to embrace team-mates on the pitch, spraying water at each other in delight.

"I'm a bit overwhelmed," added Spence. "I had a good feeling. Everyone always writes us off - we weren't even meant to get here. A lot of people said we wouldn't get out of the qualifying group.

"But we are here and that's a great result. We just need to make sure we go into the next game with the same confidence. It's all or nothing.

"We've had a really tough year. Personally and as a team we haven't prepared as much as I would have liked to for a World Cup. It shows you what this team is capable of."

Jamaica's players set out to "shock the world" in their Women's World Cup opener against France - and did so despite unrest over complaints of "subpar" support from their federation.

Facing the side ranked fifth in the world and packed with European superstars - including eight-time Champions League winners Wendie Renard and Eugenie Le Sommer - Jamaica were pitched as heavy under-

dogs but came away with an impressive goalless draw at Sydney Football Stadium.

"We said [to each other] to go and shock the world. Shock the world - nobody believes in us. We have to do it ourselves," said Tottenham and Jamaica midfielder Drew Spence.

"We have been hearing it all, but we just put our heads down. My family said 'just go and enjoy it' - and that's what we did."

Man City can improve many things - Guardiola

Pep Guardiola says Manchester City can improve "many things" after coming from behind to beat Yokohama F Marinos 5-3 in Tokyo.

The City boss also warned Erling Haaland was "fitter" than last season after scoring twice in the friendly.

"It's a good test because we don't have enough preparation," said Guardiola.

The match saw Kyle Walker start as captain, Mateo Kovacic make his debut and Joao Cancelo play following his loan spell at Bayern Munich.

"Yokohama played really well on the transitions - it was good for us," added Guardiola.

"Many things we can improve, of course, and no-one injured, which is the most important thing.

"Now we rest and prepare for Bayern Munich."

City will return to the Japan National Stadium in Tokyo on Wednesday (11:30 BST) to face Thomas Tuchel's Bundesliga champions for the first time since beating

them in last season's Champions League quarter-finals.

Guardiola's side went on to claim a Treble of Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League titles, but looked understandably rusty in their first match of pre-season.

Brazilian forward Anderson Lopes fired through the first half and Japan defender Ken Matsubara quickly doubled their lead.

The hosts, managed by former Wolves defender Kevin Muscat, are second in the J-League, 21 games into their season, and that extra match sharpness

showed early on.

But City were back level before the break after two goals in two minutes from John Stones and Julian Alvarez.

Striker Haaland scored just seven minutes after being introduced at half-time, slotting City's third into the bottom corner after turning sharply in the box. He rounded off the scoring with a back-post tap-in from a Cancelo cross in stoppage time.

In between, Rodri curled home from the edge of the box to make it 4-2 before Kenta Inoue pulled one back for Yokohama.

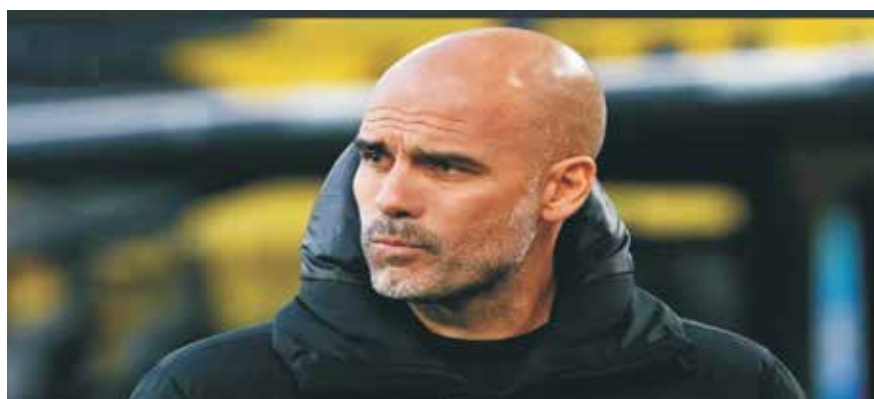
After an impressive run-out, Guardiola said

Haaland was in better shape than when he arrived from Borussia Dortmund in a £51.2m deal last year. The Norwegian frontman went on to break the Premier League season scoring record with 36 goals and hit 52 in all competitions.

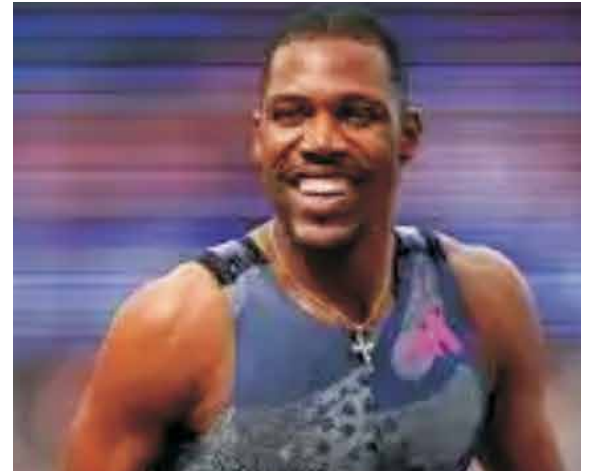
"Compared to last season he is fitter," added Guardiola. "He is much better than last season when he arrived.

"We would love him to be like last season. He is not injured, which is good, but he is still away from it like everyone.

"He knows what he has to do, we know him and in a few weeks he will be in better condition than he is now."



Again, Hughes predicts British record run at London Diamond League



A second British record smashed - and a second occasion on which the 28-year-old accurately predicted his time on the morning of his race.

Hughes was roared on by a sell-out 50,000 crowd at the London Diamond League on Sunday as he clocked 19.73 seconds to break John Regis' 30-year 200m mark.

That came just 29 days after he had beaten Linford Christie's equally long-standing 100m record, running 9.83 secs in New York and later revealing he had written that exact number in his notebook.

Remarkably, following Sunday's third-place finish behind American world 200m champion Noah Lyles and Botswana's Letsile Tebogo, the Briton revealed that had been no fluke.

"I predicted it, I wrote down that exact time this morning, at about 9:30am," Hughes said following his run at London Stadium.

"I wanted to get the British record here on home soil and I did it."

Hughes, the fastest man over 100m in the world this year, later tweeted a picture of his prediction - once again perfect to the hundredth.

Alongside the time he had written: "Running the 200m today. I'm feeling good. Ready to get going and having fun."

The European 200m champion had not been willing to commit to targeting Regis' record, despite Lyles casually insisting that was "definitely" attainable for his "modest" rival during Saturday's news conference.

Lyles, who plans to

chase a trio of gold medals at next month's World Championships in Budapest, was proven correct as Hughes shaved 0.21 secs off the previous mark.

The American backed up his own grand ambitions by moving clear on the home straight to take victory in 19.47 secs.

"I don't care about winning, as long as I execute the time that my coach wanted and got the British record," Hughes said.

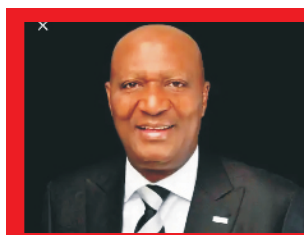
"We've got things I can work on but I executed my race and that was to get to 60m as fast as possible, then just maintain from there."

On being neck-and-neck with Lyles coming off the bend, Hughes added: "I think Noah was playing off me slightly. He was ready to chase me down!"

Evidently in the form of his life and under the continued expert guidance of Glen Mills - the coach who oversaw retired sprinting legend Usain Bolt's capture of eight Olympic gold medals - Hughes could not hope to be in a better place before bidding for a first global title later this summer.

At home in Jamaica, on the wall of his living room, a vision board lays out the Briton's lofty career and life goals - a meticulous approach that also ensured he achieved his childhood dream of becoming a qualified pilot in 2018.

Now, with two British records obliterated, and having demonstrated he can compete with the world's best athletes, he must surely expect to become the first British man to make the world 100m podium since Darren Campbell 20 years ago.



GTI boss congratulates new NPL board

Pg.22

This deity called petrol

BY DAKUKU PETERSIDE

To be precise from the onset, it is apt to posit that the centrality, omnipresence and ubiquitous nature of petrol in Nigeria has elevated it to the status of a deity in our daily lives. We revere this deity and pray that it never unleashes mayhem on us. Any scarcity or increase in the price of this deity brings untold hardship to Nigerians and we are eager to appease it at any cost. We are hugely dependent on this deity because it is the dominant form of energy that powers our way of living. We are a petrol-fuelled economy. We depend on petroleum products for transportation, domestic generation of power for homes, small and medium businesses, and mechanised farming.

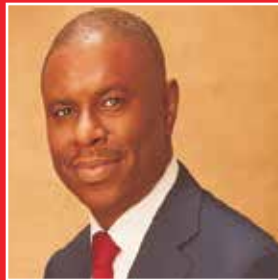
Over the decades, we appeased this deity with a sacrifice called a petrol "subsidy". Recently, the cost of this sacrifice put a knee on the neck of Nigeria, threatened her with strangulation. To breathe and survive the strangulation, the new administration took a plunge and ended the sacrifice. As expected, with the stopping of the perennial sacrifice the high priests and guardians of the deity are livid and predicting doom and damnation to Nigeria. The deity has unleashed severe punishment on the nation. The increase in petrol price has created hyperinflation, a decrease in real GDP, a cost-of-living crisis, spike in food prices and a loss of disposable income for the citizens. The situation as it stands is precarious. Yet is not intractable. Having opted to stop the deity's sacrifice, we must work hard to tame the deity – for a man who wants to wrestle with his "deity" must prepare for the battle.

Petrol is a crude oil derivative. Fortunately we have it in abundance. Most Nigerians expect that we should enjoy some benefits and should be a master of the petrol deity. Unfortunately, our history shows that this has not been the case. Instead of mastery over petrol, we have become its slave. This anomaly is directly linked with our failure to refine crude oil for local consumption over the years. The failure of the government to create the right framework to attract investment in refining of crude or resolve the decades-long collapse of refinery infrastructure has left us at the mercy of others. Other people process our oil and determine the price of finished products. For too long, we relied on imported petrol, subsidised the costs and consumed it even when there is no need. So we became almost addicted to it. This created in the minds of our people some entitlement mentality. And we must worship at the altar of petrol as long as we get it cheaply.

Successive governments fed the beast of subsidy, which made it grow bigger until it finally threatened our economic existence. Every government discussed the removal of subsidies, but none dared to try because of fear of the consequences. Goodluck Jonathan

STETHOSCOPE

With
DAKUKU PETERSIDE



administration tried but was forced to reverse it. For so long, most Nigerians- especially those in the low income brackets, saw cheap, subsidised fuel as the only benefit they derived from a morally bankrupt and corrupt Nigerian state. However, when they woke up recently to the sleaze and alleged corruption of the subsidy regime, some started accepting the idea of the end of subsidies. At least to end the corruption anatomy of the so-called subsidy. But removing subsidy has left the price of petrol in Nigeria to the vagaries of fluidity and fluctuation of prices in the international market.

There are five main factors that determine the price of petrol in the international market, and these influence the price of petrol in Nigeria. They include: the cost of crude oil from which petrol is refined; the cost of the product quoted on Platt, a price benchmark denominated in USD; the freight rate (cost of hiring a tanker to bring the product from where it is refined to where it is used, in our case West Africa); the littering expenses from transshipment and multiple handling; and Naira/ USD exchange rate. Any change in one or a combination of these factors will affect the petrol price in Nigeria. With subsidies gone, we are not protected from these events' harsh realities. We do not have control over these factors and forces that determine the price of petrol. Therefore, we are at the mercy of this deity.

To survive, we must look for an alternative; fortunately, these alternatives exist though some may be more expensive. The government and our universities have been reluctant to research and explore these alternative energy sources for some inexplicable reasons. There are several alternatives to reduce or replace the use of petrol in the country. These alternatives can help diversify energy sources, promote sustainability, and mitigate the impact of fossil fuel consumption on the environment. Nigeria has significant natural gas reserves. Encouraging the use of compressed natural gas (CNG) and liquefied natural gas (LNG) as vehicle fuels can reduce the dependency on petrol for transportation. Promoting the production and use of Ethanol and biodiesel can provide cleaner alternatives for petrol in transportation.

Promoting hybrid vehicles, which combine internal combustion engines

with electric motors, can be a transitional step towards full electrification. Encouraging the adoption of electric vehicles (EV) can significantly reduce petrol consumption. This involves building the necessary EV charging infrastructure and providing incentives for EV adoption, such as tax benefits and subsidies. Investing in renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power can reduce the dependency on fossil fuels for electricity generation, freeing up more petrol for other uses. Enhancing public transportation systems, such as buses and trains, can reduce the number of individual vehicles on the road and lower overall petrol consumption.

Past administrations ignored these alternatives, and we hope this current administration will focus on them. The petrol price upward swing is not going away too soon. This is a justification for some proceeds of subsidy removal to be applied to investment in viable energy sources and social services like education, health, and affordable public transportation. It is a welcome development that this administration is listening to the yearnings and demands of the citizens. I salute Mr President for calling for a review of the proposal to give N8,000 per month to 12m poor Nigerians and commend the National Economic Council chaired by the Vice President for coming up with an alternative palliative strategy.

I will argue that although there is room for a well-considered palliative scheme for the poorest among us, that must not be the focus, for palliative is merely short-term measures to ameliorate the sufferings, whilst developing alternative energy is the long-term solution and must be the focal point of any government intervention. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of energy production in any modern economy. Production of goods and services for local use and export is fuelled by energy.

In the meantime, there are a few things the government must do to cushion the negative impact of a hike in the price of petrol. First, it must provide proper Communication. The government is losing the battle of properly framing this petrol price increase to its advantage. The dominant frame in the public sphere is suffering - all our people are seeing and hearing is suffering. The

government's spin doctors must rise to the occasion and win the battle for the hearts and minds of the people. This is crucial in transitioning from dependence on petrol deity and maximising alternative energy regime. Secondly, even though the government must allow market forces to determine the price of petrol, it must provide a regulatory framework and infrastructure to influence the market. Therefore, I advocate for adequate regulation, price monitoring, price intelligence (Indicative price versus market price), and some quasi-interventions when necessary. This is important, especially now, because we are still a petrol-dependent economy even though we have deregulated the system and removed subsidies.

Third, implementing energy efficiency measures in industries, buildings, and transportation can help reduce overall energy consumption, including petrol and raising awareness about the benefits of alternative fuels and sustainable practices can encourage individuals and businesses to make environmentally conscious choices. Fourth, supporting businesses, especially SMEs, at this challenging time with the petrol price crisis the country is facing. The government must provide a tax holiday and other incentives to help most of these businesses survive. These businesses are central to our economic activities and must be protected from collapse.

Furthermore, we must admit that the current challenge in Nigeria requires a bold energy policy and a seriously informed economic policy. This time, as hard as it may be on the citizens, provides an opportunity to get things right and push Nigeria towards the path of industrialisation and growth. Government must seize this opportunity to make informed socio-economic choices to cut Nigeria off from continued service of a petrol deity we do not even know. It is important to note that transitioning to alternative fuels and energy sources requires careful planning, investment, and collaboration between the government, private sector, and citizens. Additionally, these alternatives' specific suitability and feasibility may vary depending on regional factors and infrastructure capabilities.

In conclusion, we must do whatever it takes not to go back to the subsidy. It is an ill wind that blows no one any good. This is a time for everyone to unite and push Nigeria to the next level. It is not a time for scoring cheap political points and doing nothing. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Our collective duty is to provide an energy transition that is sustainable and pulls us out of the shackles of the petrol deity once and for all times.

