



NEWS

Northern Union: I am not rattled, says Awoniyi

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The Benue State governor George Akume was again thrown into mourning, Sunday, in Jos when his wife's bosom friend, Mrs Christy Awua slumped and died at a thanksgiving ceremony organized as part of a reception for the honorary doctorate degree

Mrs Akume's friend dies at thanksgiving service

conferred on the governor by the University of Jos, Plateau state.

This incidence brings to two the number of Benue people on the governor's entourage who died while in

From Hir Joseph, Correspondent (Makurdi)

Jos for the honour done him (Akume).

Confirming the incidence, Mrs Ene Ogbeh, the chief

press secretary to the wife of the governor, Mrs Regina Akume, said the death was a great loss to Benue state as the deceased was a bosom friend of her boss.

She said her boss wept

bitterly, just as she wondered why the woman who left for Jos healthy, would slump and die.

Sources said late Mrs Awua slumped dead at the NKST Church in Jos where a

thanksgiving service was organized for the governor.

The deceased, a business woman and owner of Benue Kitchen, one of the biggest eatery joint in Makurdi, slumped and died in the church just as she made to sit after spraying the

Contd. on Pg 2

Confab opens Feb 21

FG list out today

The federal government will today publish a full list of delegates to the national political reform conference which takes off on Monday, February 21, 2005, President Olusegun

By Reuben Yunana, State House Correspondent

Obasanjo said yesterday.

Speaking on national television and radio, the president confirmed *Daily*

Trust's exclusive report of last Monday outlining government's plans to go ahead with the national dialogue with the announcement of the full list of delegates as well as chairman and secretary of the

conference.

Daily Trust had reported that President Obasanjo might this week announce the full list of government's delegates to the national conference with Supreme Court judge, Justice Niki Tobi from Rivers state as the

chairman, while renowned Catholic Priest, Reverend Mathew Hassan Ku-kah will serve as conference secretary.

President Obasanjo said at the broadcast yesterday that "the final list of delegates to the conference will be published tomorrow and I will address the conference on Monday the 21st of February, 2005 at its inauguration."

He called on "all Nigerians within and beyond our shores to continue to provide encouragement and

support for the conference," adding: "this is one major chance that we all have to be part of history, to put all our cards on the table, to discuss as one family, engage in exchange of ideas, vigorous debate and innovative involvement to shape the future of our nation."

President Obasanjo stressed that government remains "truly and fully" committed to ensuring that the opportunity offered by the conference is utilised to address those issues that have

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L-R: Justice Emmanuel Ayoola, the guest speaker, Dr Richard Goldstone, the Minister of Justice, Chief Akinlolu Olujimi and the acting Inspector General of Police, Mr Sunday Ehindero, during the public lecture on "Preventing Crimes Against Humanity in the 21st Century" held in Abuja ...yesterday. Pix: Kennedy Egbonodje.

FG vows to restore peace in Togo

One Killed as opposition protest

Nigeria will do whatever it takes to ensure peace, stability and democracy in the region, the spokesman of the president, Femi Fani-Kayode, said yesterday when asked whether Nigeria will consider intervening militarily in Togo.

"Whatever it takes to not only protect the territorial integrity of our nation, but also to ensure there's peace, democracy and stability in the West African sub-region,

Elkanah Chawai, Reporter (Foreign Desk) with Agency Report

we will do," said Fani-Kayode.

This statement is coming after President Obasanjo withdrew from the ECOWAS negotiating team because his advance team was refused entry into the country. President Obasanjo has urged the Togolese authorities to respect the constitution and revert to the provision that existed before the late Eyad-

ema's death.

Meanwhile, at least one man died yesterday in Togo's capital after security forces broke up a barricade in the opposition stronghold of Be, where protests against the army's naming of a new president have been strongest.

One witness said the man had been shot in the head.

"There was a clash between the people and the security forces," said a teacher,

who also declined to give his name.

The security forces prev-

Contd. on Pg 2

DNA test confirms parents of 'Baby 81'

DNA test results confirm that a baby boy rescued from tsunami debris in Sri Lanka and dubbed "Baby 81" belongs to the couple who launched a wrenching court battle for his custody, a court announced yesterday.

The finding ended weeks of uncertainty and drama surrounding the infant, who became a symbol of families torn apart by the Dec. 26 tsunami, and set the stage for a reunion Wednesday with his parents Jenita and

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NNPC may resume oil search in Chad Basin

The Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), has approved \$3.4 million for the completion of the expanded Chad Basin Integrated Studies designed to establish and ascertain the hydrocarbon potential of the Lake Chad Basin.

The amount brings to \$6.1 million what the NNPC has committed so far to carryout the studies as part of a possible drive to resume oil search in the Lake Chad Basin if scientific data gathered points to any prospects.

NAPIMS Group Manager, Engineer Phillips Chukwu, revealed the corporation's additional expenses on the Lake Chad at Magumeri local government area of Borno State when he led a

From Abdullahi Bego, Regional Editor (North-East)

team of NNPC staff to commission two boreholes rehabilitated and provided by the NNPC to two communities in Jere and Magumeri local government areas of Borno State.

Engineer Chukwu said that the additional money approved by the NNPC is a sign of the commitment of the federal government and the NNPC to find oil in the Lake Chad Basin.

The corporation had one year ago renovated and provided two other boreholes to communities in the oil search area around the Lake Chad as part of its community service initiative.

The boreholes were drilled several years ago when the NNPC was engaged in oil exploration activities in the Lake Chad, which were terminated in the late 1980s in controversial circumstances.

Earlier, the Shehu of Borno, Dr Mustapha Umar El-Kanemi, had called on the NNPC to push ahead with oil exploration which it earlier abandoned in the Lake Chad.

The Shehu told the visiting NNPC team which was

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News

Confab *Contd. from Pg 1*

"bothered most stakeholders, communities and constituencies for some time."

President Obasanjo cautioned Nigerians, "that, we must not be afraid to disagree with each other provided we also have our eyes on the goals of unity, peace, harmony, patriotism and progress for all our disagreement must not lead to disintegration."

In a surprise move, President Obasanjo commended the National Assembly for its response to government's request for the sum of N937 million to fund the conference.

"Contrary to some perspectives, the assembly's response has encouraged us to look inwards and to become creative at sourcing funds for the conference. I want to specially thank the National Assembly for its maturity, support and encouragement for the conference what I can assure participants at the

conference is that they will have enough resources to complete the assignment in the time allocated to it," he assured.

The president commended the media, which according to him, has been following the selection process diligently by encouraging debates on the margins of the conference.

He said government needs the media to carry the society along in the process of discussing the national question and proffering solutions for repositioning the country "for peace, stability, harmony, progress, development and democracy."

The conference secretariat, he said, is being put together with a view to make it efficient and effective, stressing that all government nominees were chosen because of their track records, experience and enthusiasm, while urging them to make contributions for unity and progress of Nigeria.

Mrs Akume *Contd. from Pg 1*

celebrant with naira notes.

Daily Trust could not reach them for comments. However, sources said the late Mrs Awua's family members were in pains just as a cross section of Benue people have continued to wonder why tragedy should strike in quick successions at the height of the governor's celebration.

The Sunday tragedy was the second since Thursday when the governor led hundreds of Benue indigenes to Jos where he was conferred with an honorary doctorate degree. The Thursday incident was as a result of speeding by his outrider, Sergeant David Sula, who had a head on collision with a Toyota Corolla driven by a catholic priest.

DNA *Contd. from Pg 1*

Murugupillai Jeyarajah.

"I am so happy, and I only have to thank God for giving my child back," Murugupillai, the boy's father, said. "We've got the results for all our hardships."

Nine couples originally claimed the boy in the coastal town of Kalmunai. The Jeyarajahs were the only couple to file a formal claim, but they couldn't document it because their records were swept away in the tsunami.

The court had ruled that the baby must stay in the hospital until DNA tests could confirm his parentage, and the family underwent the testing Feb. 9.

The judge unsealed the results from an envelope during a hearing attended only by lawyers Monday, read them aloud and then ordered the couple, hospital officials and baby to appear before the court on Wednesday.

"Since they are the biological parents, I have noticed them to appear on that day and we will hand over the baby," Kalmunai Judge M.P. Mohaideen said after the hearing.

"The reason they had to go through a DNA test is to ensure that the baby is not discriminated against," Mohaideen said. "This is the first such case in Sri Lanka and it is a historic case."

The couple's lawyer, S.H.M. Manarudeen, was embraced by a weeping Murugupillai after he broke the news to the Jeyarajahs.

"We will go and see the baby this evening. We're happy," said Jenita, the baby's mother.

The child's name is Abilass, and he was born Oct. 19, the Jeyarajahs said. He was

pulled from his mother's arms when the tsunami hit on Dec. 26, they said.

Rescuers found the baby amid mud, debris and corpses after the tsunami, and he was named "Baby 81" because he was the 81st patient admitted that day to the hospital in Kalmunai, 185 miles east of the capital, Colombo.

Jenita Jeyarajah has said that as soon as she regains custody of her baby, she will fulfill vows to smash 100 coconuts at a temple of the elephant-headed Hindu god, Ganesh, offer sweet rice to the warrior god, Murugan, and kill a rooster for the goddess Kali.

The family lost all their belongings to the tsunami and have been living in a camp close to the town.

ented people from approaching the body and declined to comment on the incident.

Opposition leaders had earlier said between one and three people had been killed by security forces yesterday morning. The Interior Minister denied there had been any shooting.

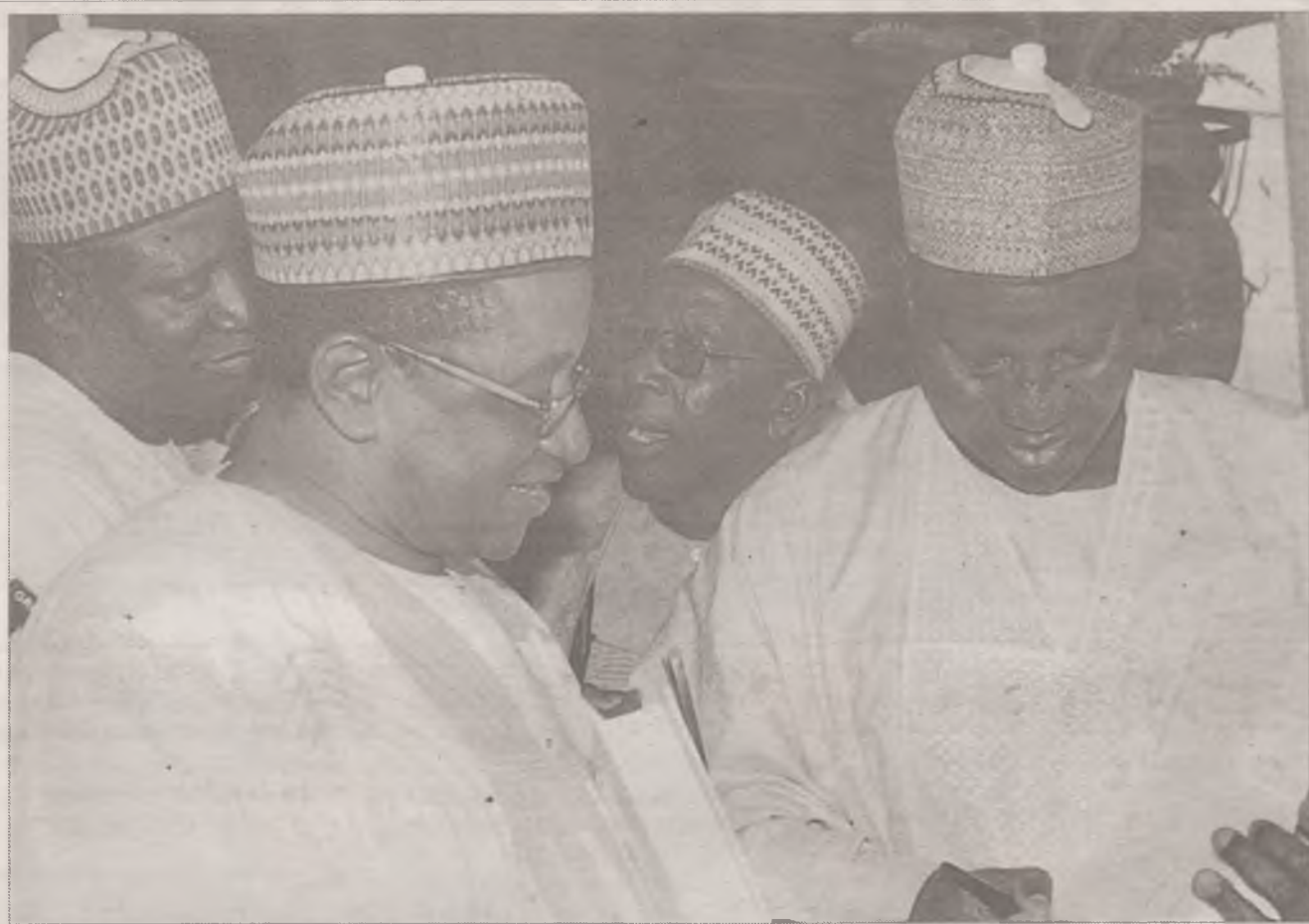
In another development, Togo said that it would not send a team back to Niamey for talks with West African officials, throwing up a stand-off over the constitutional crisis that followed a military power grab after the death of Gnassingbe Eyadema.

"There is no question of us returning to Niamey; ECOWAS has taken its decisions and now has to wait to see them enforced," Foreign Minister, Tozoua Kokou, told AFP here after a meeting with Burkina Faso President, Blaise Compaore.

West African leaders "are waiting the response," ECOWAS spokeswoman,



Jenita and Murugupillai Jeyarajah embrace their son "Baby 81" in celebration of the results of the DNA test which confirmed that Jenita and Murugupillai are the real parents of the boy.



Alhaji Muhammad Imam Yahaya, Chairman/CEO of NUB International Bank Limited (left) and Justice Salihu Modibbo Alfa Belgore of the Supreme Court, during the public presentation of Justice Belgore's biography in Abuja ...recently.

FG *Contd. from Pg 1*

Adrienne Diop, said yesterday in Nigeria, where the organisation has its headquarters.

She said that no precise deadline has been set for Togo's answer but that "they said they needed it in the shortest possible time. They expect it by tomorrow, at the latest."

A Togolese team led by Prime Minister, Koffi Sama, was Saturday in Niamey for talks with ECOWAS Chief Mamadou Tandja, president of Niger, following an aborted meeting a day earlier with five West African Heads of State initially planned for Lome.

The discussions hinged on restoring order in the tiny republic of 4.7 million people, where Eyadema's 39-year-old son, Faure Gnassingbe, was elevated to the presidency by the military to avoid a power vacuum after his father's

death after 38 years of rule.

Niger's Foreign Minister, Aichatou Mindaoudou, had said that the Togolese delegation would be back in Niamey in the coming days to let ECOWAS know of its decision.

Togolese authorities acknowledged, meanwhile, that they had a decision to make and affirmed their commitment to fulfill their obligations.

"ECOWAS has decided and we are now examining whether we can do what ECOWAS wants," General Seyi Memene, deputy chair of Togo's parliamentary subcommittee on defence, said after meeting in Ouagadougou with Burkina Faso President, Blaise Compaore.

in his palace on a courtesy call that the people of Borno and indeed the northern part of the country are deeply concerned about the oil issue in the Lake Chad, adding that resumption of oil search would go a long way to

Senate to pass 2005 budget today

By Isa Saunsi, Political Reporters (Senate)

The Senate is set to pass the budget today as the House concluded debate last week putting its figure at N1.846 trillion while the Senate put federal government's expenditures and incomes at N1.888 trillion.

Passing of the 2005 appropriation bill has severely been shifted and the two chambers are expected to harmonise the almost N50 million difference in their figures within this week to pave way for the adoption of a single Appropriation Act.

Sources said that the Senate has included the N94 billion expected from the sale of NITEL and ALSCON in the budget following an assur-

ance from the finance ministry that the two companies will be sold this year.

President Olusegun Obasanjo had in October last year, presented a budget of N1.617 trillion to the joint session of the National Assembly at a benchmark of 27 dollars per barrel. The benchmark was later reviewed upwards to 30 dollars per barrel.

A member of the Senate's appropriation and finance committee however, told Daily Trust that the budget may still be delayed even though he could not explain why.

Chad, had struck and found oil on commercial quantities in its own side of the Lake Chad, some one hundred kilometres from the sites where the NNPC started exploration activities several years ago.

NNPC *Contd. from Pg 1* cultivate and sustain the confidence of the people that government is indeed committed to find oil in the Lake Chad area.

Nigeria's neighbour to the east, the Republic of

News

Northern Union: I am not rattled, says Awoniyi

The chairman, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Chief Sunday Awoniyi, has said that he is not rattled by the formation of a rival northern organisation, the Northern Union (NU), in Abuja last week.

In a ten minute telephone conversation with *Daily Trust* yesterday, Chief Awoniyi repeated "no comments" over 30 times adding for good effect that, "get a pen and paper write down 15, you are the 15th journalist that has called me on this issue and I will tell you the same thing I told them: no comments."

In between however, the ACF leader whose tone was agitated told *Daily Trust* that, "you have covered our meetings several times and if you people as journalists cannot fathom what is right or wrong, then what I can tell you is; No comments."

Hyenas wreak havoc in Kebbi

From Kabir Dogon Daji
Correspondent (Birnin Kebbi)

An influx of hyenas alleged to have come from neighbouring Niger and Benin Republics have for the last one week caused nightmares to the people of Suru local government area of Kebbi State.

The hyena's moving in large numbers have destroyed and killed an unspecified number of animals in the villages of Tungar Kirya, Kurakware and Yarima respectively.

The council chairman of Suru local government Alhaji Mohammed Ruwa disclosed that the report of the strange animals had earlier been reported to the council for intervention.

According to the council boss, on receiving the report from the people of Tungar Kirka, he immediately summoned local hunters to pursue but not to kill the animals.

He stated that hunters called in from neighbouring local governments have failed to trap any hyena.

The chairman explained that the animals freely operate during the night attacking Fulani (nomadic) settlements and making away with some animals that include sheep and goats.

Alhaji Ruwa further disclosed that the council would not hesitate or shirk its efforts to protect its citizens and their property at all cost, adding that "we will provide all necessary materials, logistics and rewards to the volunteer hunters," he said.

However, when *Daily Trust* contacted the chief of the hunters of Dakin-Gari district, Aliyu Maidaji Dakingari, he revealed that since the day the report reached them and the order by the local government to undergo the exercise, over 1,000 hunters have been involved.

From Sani Babadoko, Bureau Chief (Kaduna)

"I was just going to talk to you as one Northerner to the other but I have declined no comments."

Last week, a group of young Northern politicians met in Abuja and declared the formation of the Northern Union directly challenging the ACF while they said has lost focus. They said they were also to champion the cause of power shift to the North come 2007.

The group included, Chief Olusola Saraki, Chief Paul Unongo, Brig-Gen. Muhammadu Buba Marwa, Professor Ango Abdullahi, Alhaji Abubakar Koko, and Sidi H. Ali among others and are thought to be sponsored as a challenge to the ACF whose leadership has been perceived as opposed to the Obasanjo administration.

The phone conversation with the ACF leader went as follows:

My name is Sani Babadoko. I am calling from the Daily Trust. I want to get a response from you Sir, on the formation last week of a rival northern organisation, the Northern Union (NU).

Ok, I know you. Please get this down. Get a pen write down this one five (15). Yes you are the 15th journalist to pose this question to me and I will tell you the same thing I

told them: No comments! No comments! No comments!!!

Ok, Sir, you mean absolutely no comments?

No comments, no comments, just write it like that; no comments.

I learnt the ACF leadership is rather confused over the development?

No I am not confused. I am not confused at all. Just report that I said no comments. Don't go and cook any story on me. Just say I told you no comments.

Are you going to extend an olive branch to the new organisation, Sir?

You are a journalist, you have covered our meetings several times and if you cannot fathom between right and wrong, then leave it like that. I have no comments. So how are you preparing for the confab?

We are preparing to report it when it takes off. So Sir, when is ACF going to name the two delegates? Will you share the three ACF slots with the NU?

I say no comments. Please leave me alone. ACF is going to participate with other well meaning Nigerians and possibly find a solution to our problems. Didn't you read my speech at the last book presentation by Ahmadu Kurfi? There is nothing more I can say about the conference."



Wives of former South African President, Mrs. Graca Machel Mandela (left) and former Nigerian head of state, Mrs. Ajoke Murtala Mohammed (m) and glo mobile head of promotion, Mrs. Yemi Halim during Mrs. Mandela's visit to Globacom mobile communication office in Abuja...recently. Pic: Felix Onighinde

NNPC told to subject self to due process

By Reuben Yunana, State House Correspondent

As part of its ongoing war against corruption, the federal government has ordered the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), to subject itself to the office of Due process under the presidency.

President Obasanjo said yesterday that the directive

was informed by government's commitment to ensure that all its transactions and business pass through the Due Process mechanism.

The president who spoke while declaring open the first Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), national conference, said already, his office has directed the group managing director (GMD) of the NNPC, Mr. Funso Kupolokun to comply by ensuring that all contracts awarded by the corporation pass through due process.

He pointed out that this was necessary because "NNPC has always sought to escape Due Process, but I have given an order for them to obey the process. No aspect of government transaction, no aspect of government business will escape," Obasanjo emphasised.

President Obasanjo said the federal government was committed to the due process policy as a means to

fight corruption adding: "nothing has been prepared or said to undermine the Due Process. We have not allowed those who want to kill it to kill it, we are irretrievably committed to the Due Process. We appreciate what the Due Process is doing. We believe we should institutionalise the Due Process. We are solidly committed to deal with corruption," he said, warning that those who were involved in the fight against corruption should beware as they would be victims of "attacks including physical assaults."

Obasanjo who recalled that he was failed, "for speaking against corruption and on unconstitutional ways of doing things, said the Due Process would be institutionalised with the passage of the public procurement Bill before the National Assembly.

"The Bill will provide for a cadre devoted to the Due Process. We said identify them, train them and do what is necessary to ensure probity and accountability in governance," the president said.

Destitutes, Okada riders, traders contribute to Jigawa pension scheme

By Hassan A. Karofi
Correspondent (Dutse)

Henceforth, all categories of people in Jigawa state including destitute, okada riders, petty traders and residents of the state can now participate in the state's contributory pension scheme according to governor Ibrahim Turaki.

The governor who disclosed this shortly after the signing of the state's contributory pension scheme law 01 of 2005, said the contributors among those outside the civil service can now participate by contributing N600 monthly while the state and local government will contribute N200 each to the fund.

Daily Trust reports that the state's contributory pension scheme has now reached over N1bn deposit after two years of introduction.

Governor Turaki revealed that the initiative is to enable those with little earnings and who are not part of the conventional government service have access to the scheme so as to enjoy the benefits of the scheme when they reach old age like their counterparts in the civil service.

While explaining the new law, the governor further explained that the decision to open the scheme to those outside the civil service was to integrate all segments of the society better to enjoy the scheme especially at their old

beginning of a better life for pensioners in the state.

The scheme has the Head of the service in the state, Alhaji Ibrahim Manzo, as chairman while Comrade Sani Kiri will serve as the executive secretary. Other members are drawn from the banking sector, technocrats, businessman and the civil society.

The governor shortly after the signing of the law, enjoined people to participate fully in the scheme through monthly contribution.

Government he added is committed to the ideals of socio-economic development of its people regardless of their social status as the scheme he explained will go further to improve the lives of all residents of the state.

Expanding further on the scheme, governor Turaki said henceforth, contributors who have worked with any government agency for more than the stipulated years qualify to enjoy from the fund will immediately begin to access their pension, while those who cannot continue can also withdraw and be entitled to their contributions.

The governor who described the scheme as one of the best initiative towards a more responsive and motivated civil service said it is designed to facilitate timely benefits, improve people's condition of living and give them assurance for a better life.

"The fund is always accessible at any time a pensioner retires. It is unlike what happens before," he further revealed.

He equally informed participants that the scheme has distinguishing features from previous ones as the law has provided for a lot of incentives that will amount to the

Mrs Abacha, others mourn Wada Nas

Mrs Maryam Abacha, former first lady was among thousands of Nigerians who were in Funtua at the weekend for the 40-day prayer for late Alhaji Wada Nas.

Others include a ten-man delegation from the Imo state governor, Chief Achike Udenwa who had intended to personally attend the 40-day prayer for Alhaji Wada Nas who they believed to be a champion of their country.

Alhaji Nas was a minister under the late Head of state General Sani Abacha as Mrs. Abacha said the family was saddened by his death.

The former minister who was the leader of the Peoples

Solidarity Part (PSP), had always defended the legacies of late General Sani Abacha even when his former colleagues turned against Abacha after his demise in June 1999.

The Imo State delegation led by the special adviser on political matters, Chief Eguh said they decided to make the trip by road to express their sadness over the death of Alhaji Wada Nas.

He said Wada Nas died fighting the cause of the Nigerian masses wherever they are, pointing out that he was a champion of Igbos at home and in the diaspora.

Chief Iguh said governor Udenwa had made plans to be among the multitude to

grace the occasion but had to travel abroad on a short notice and directed a team of ten delegates to be on the visit.

He said in his life time, Wada Nas showed sympathy for their aspirations for an Igbo presidency in 2007 and had paid solidarity visits to several eastern and south-south states.

Chief Eguh said the deceased politician will continue to be remembered as a steady and courageous politician who never relented telling the truth to those in power.

The delegation commiserated with the family of the decease.

News

National Confab... National Confab... National Confab...

Northern senators explain rejection of confab

The Northern Senators Forum says they suspect there are plans to use the forthcoming national political reform conference to undermine the political disposition of the North, hence their unanimous decision at a meeting on Wednesday to reject the conference.

By Isa Sanusi
Political Reporter

aware of it. The forum led by Senator Idris Kuta (PDP/Niger), therefore agreed that its members across party line should not support or help to facilitate the conference.

Speaking yesterday, the chairman, senate committee

on sports, Senator Kanti Bello, said the planned national conference may end up weakening the North politically, adding that president Obasanjo has the right to summon some people to advise him on how to run the nation.

"My advise to the president is that if he respects the constitution, he should not use the nation's

funds to financing his conference and I am advising him not to use security vote to sponsor the conference."

Senator Kanti Bello said the North particularly has to be careful with the conference as it may not be of any benefit to the region.

"The conference is an indictment on all members of the National Assembly," said Senator Kanti, adding that the Northern Senators Forum and the whole senate saw no reason why the nation's resources should be wasted on the conference.

Former perm sec lambasts NASS

Retired permanent secretary of the Gombe state government, Dr. Garba Mohammed Bajoga, said Nigerians should not be blamed if they become suspicious of the position of the National Assembly over the proposed national conference on political reforms.

He said the National Assembly had in the past disappointed Nigerians by abandoning its role of keeping a check on the executive.

He said in the past, the National Assembly had dragged its feet but after being "settled", gave in to whatever requests the presidency made.

The former transition committee chairman of Funa Kaye local government said the conference is just a waste of funds because already, there were people who should take care of such issues.

He said, "if we cannot solve our problems through the elected representatives

From Mohammed Abubakar, Gombe

we are not going to solve anything. This idea of a national conference is somebody's idea who wants to play with Nigerians."

He called on the elite to be responsive to the need of the masses because, "Nigerians are suffering while the average Nigerian is going through hell in the midst of plenty. If the elite think they are going to play games, one of these days, the cookie will crumble."

Addressing journalists recently in Gombe, the Senate Committee chairman on information, Mr. Tawar Wada, expressed the possibility of the National Assembly changing its position on the national conference.

He said, "should any person come up with a superior argument that the position of the National Assembly is wrong, then we will bow to superior argument. Nobody should accuse us of collecting any Ghana-must-Go."

Gov Mu'azu okays conference

The Bauchi state governor, Alhaji Ahmed Adamu Mu'azu, has thrown his support for the proposed national conference on political reforms.

The governor said Nigerians have a right under the constitution to meet and discuss any issue under the sun.

He said, "the constitution

of the federal republic of Nigeria is very clear on this issue. Nigerians have a right, fundamental human right to meet and discuss anything under the sun that will more this country forward."

He said he believes that the National Assembly did not hold but that they would not appropriate money for it.

Responding to questions

from journalists at the presidential lodge Gombe on whether he has the ambition to lead the country come 2007 as is being speculated, Governor Mu'azu said he has no ambition other than what God has destined for him to do.

Said the Governor, "what I would be in the next one minute or thereafter is totally in the hands of the Almighty God. My prayers is that God will grant me the wisdom, the courage and protection to do whatever job he earmarks me to do. I have no ambition other than God's plan."

At the meeting, a source told *Daily Trust* yesterday that many senators insisted that President Obasanjo might use the conference to realise some hidden agenda that if successful may put the North at the back seat of the nation's polity. However, some notable senators close to President Obasanjo argued at the forum that even if the president has any hidden agenda they are not



President Olusegun Obasanjo laying the foundation stone of the General Murtala Mohammed centre for ethnics and leadership in Abuja yesterday others are, General Ibrahim Babangida former president, Mrs. Grace Mandela, Mrs. Ajoke Mohammed, Gen. T.Y. Danjuma during the occasion. Pic: Joe Oroye

NCF to insist on multi-party democracy

A coalition of some political parties, the National Consensus Forum (NCF), is to push for the sustenance of multi-party democracy during the forthcoming national confab.

Secretary of the forum, Joseph Boko, who disclosed this to *Daily Trust* in Abuja yesterday, said NCF will canvass a system that will allow parties to grow with time, and prevent a descend into a one-party state.

Book said the present set-up was not favourable to

By Habeeb I. Pindiga
Political Report

multi-party system as the existence of smaller parties was being threatened.

He said NCF has decided to participate in the conference because it offers an opportunity to proffer solutions to the nation's problems.

Though the government's proposal fell short of expectations, the NCF scribe said a sovereign national conference was impracticable under the

present democratic system.

Boko said therefore that there was need to participate in the only available opportunity, with the hope that it would set the stage for salvation.

He also suggested that government should be given the benefit of doubt about the conference and called on all stakeholders to honour invitations to the confab.

NCF's delegates to the confab are its chairman, Senator Ike Nwachukwu and Boko.

Full text of Obasanjo's speech

It is with great pleasure that I address you today to give you an update on preparations for the forthcoming National Political Reform Conference. This has become necessary because of the great enthusiasm being shown by all segments of society towards the conference. I thank God that we have all become involved in one way or the other in helping to work out modalities, selecting candidates and shaping the content and context of the conference. What has been most interesting is that even those that disagree with aspects of the process, all do agree that a conference is necessary and desirable.

Government has continued to make the necessary arrangements to ensure a focused, well-organised and productive Conference. In fact, the state governments and other stakeholders have responded to the request for selection of delegates with admirable enthusiasm and we are at the final stages of putting the list of delegates

together. It has been encouraging to note that virtually all the states have sent in their very best representatives as a demonstration of support for and commitment to the conference. It is also very encouraging that civil society groups and stakeholders have responded with enthusiasm and have, through their own processes, sent in the list of their delegates.

While government continues to receive hundreds of requests from patriotic Nigerians to be part of the conference or be in attendances at the conference, I would like to use the opportunity to appeal to all that everyone cannot be part of the conference or be in attendance at the conference. But there are several other ways in which everyone can participate. The conference secretariat will work out such modalities and make them public when the conference commences. If you are not selected as a delegate, feel very free to use one of the

modalities that would be announced to make your presentation and be part of the debate.

Most of the people nominated by me are so nominated because of their known track records, experience and enthusiasm for aspects of development in Nigeria. I want to believe that knowing why they are nominated, they will all agree to make contributions for the present consolidation of the unity and progress of Nigeria and its future greatness as they have contributed in the past.

I am convinced that all those selected and all the nominees would want to be counted on the side of history and continuous commitment to our collective efforts to build a united, peaceful, equitable, stable, prosperous, progressive and democratic Nigeria.

The Secretariat is being put together with a view to ensuring an efficient, effective and committed secretariat. I must use this opportunity to commend the National Assembly for its

response to government's request for funding. Contrary to some perspectives, the Assembly's response has encouraged us to look inwards and to become creative at sourcing funds for the conference. I want to specially thank the National Assembly for its maturity, support, encouragement and inputs into the arrangements for the conference. What I can assure participants to the conference is that they will have enough resources to complete the assignment in the time allocated to it.

I am pleased that the media is following the selection process diligently and encouraging debates on the margins of the Conference. This is very important if we are going to carry all in the society along with us in the process of discussing the national question and proffering solutions repositioning our country for peace, stability, harmony, progress, development and democracy.

What has become clear is that Nigerians are becoming very politically mature and

willing to explore democratic processes for articulating and pursuing their interests. While existing processes may not satisfy everyone, as is normal in all societies, we must place the interest of Nigeria above everything else and we must remain committed to building a society that we can all be happy with. We should not shy away from confronting difficulties especially if we continue to believe in God, the nation, and a future that will be better than today. We should not be afraid to meet and discuss our problems challenges, fears, aspirations and prospects as a people. We should not discuss in fear and we should never fear to discuss.

And we must not be afraid to disagree with each other provided we also have our eyes on the goals of unity, peace, harmony, patriotism and progress for all. Our disagreement must not lead to disintegration.

The final list of delegates to the conference will be published tomorrow and I will address the conference

on Monday the 21st of February, 2005 at its inauguration.

I call on all Nigerians within and beyond our shores to continue to provide encouragement and support for the conference. This is one major chance that we all have to be part of history, to put all our cards on the table, to discuss as one family, engage in exchange of ideas, vigorous debate and innovative involvement in shaping the future of our nation.

Finally, let me assure you that Government remains truly and fully committed to ensuring that this opportunity is utilized to address those issues that have bothered most stakeholders, communities and constituencies for sometime. We continue to pray to God for guidance and we are confident that Nigerians will show the usual capacity to transcend minor differences and limitations to work for the larger good of our nation.

Thank you and may God continue to bless Nigeria.

Feature

A day set apart for love

Even today, what is left of the downpour of love and affection that was witnessed yesterday, February 14th, can still be felt. Spouses and lovers, joined by other categories of affection-showering people, paused from their busy lives to show love for a day. Here's a close look at a very special 24-hour celebration.

Saint Valentine's Day is popularly believed to be a day for lovers. A day when love is shown to a loved one, it has been celebrated from generation to generation.

Usually, the Saint Valentine's Day works up a frenzy of excitement in people who believe in it. Back in university, there used to be so much anticipation in the air; you could almost burst with having to wait till the dawn of the day. And just like Christmas, Sallah or any other festival, Val's day, as it is commonly called draws with it great festivity, depending on who is spending time where, when and with whom.

The most common scenario is a couple, who



Though unable to communicate in English, this manager of Oceanic catering services makes beautiful cakes for special occasions like Valentine's Day.

the kids to worry about! Newly married couples who have no issue between them yet may actually get into the drift of Val's day.

Perhaps what makes the day so memorable for many, are the gifts that change hands, the sweet words, best behavioural displays and other special

either specially prepared in the home or an eat-out date complete with candle-light can be considered as relaxing and romantic for the exchange of vows, promises and gifts.

Overseas, bookings are made for the occasion and even 'married-with-children' couples leave the kids home with a baby sitter, nanny or drop them off at a kind neighbour's!

However, a sample of people's opinion on Val's day revealed that the day commonly marked as lover's day is not all about lovers alone. It's a day to show love to all, irrespective of status,

say that it is lover's day, but it is not supposed to be strictly for lovers. It's a day for us to share what we have with them, show them care, not necessarily material love."

Mr. Oladeji Yusuf, also a resident at Wuse Zone 6, said that Saint Valentine's day is a time for people to get together and love one another as God said we should do. You know, it's like obeying the 'love your neighbour as yourself' commandment."

And in Kaduna, a basketballer called Jude said that "valentine is a good occasion for people to rekindle their love for their spouses. It is a time for them to be more faithful and loving towards each other."

While stressing that Val's day is not only for lovers, Miss Olupe Atoyebi, a graduate based in Abuja said that "Valentine's day is a time

do to day," she said.

Similarly, Miss Latifah Olojo opined from Lagos thus: "It is a day for friends to be together. I don't really believe in it, I guess it's because I don't have a Val. But if I did have one, I would expect to spend time with whomever it is, and of course, receive a gift for the occasion."

A respondent who pleaded anonymity, however, said that he doesn't believe in Val's day, although he discovered that women are impressed at this time by cakes and gifts. "In fact, being a Monday, I will be fasting that day."

A married woman in Ilorin, Mrs. Olawuyi, had this to say: "My children are my valentines. Their dad is out of town, so I'll cuddle them; show them love, because they are my companions 24/7. Besides that, Valentine's day is just going to be like



Beautiful cakes on display at Oceanic catering, Wuse II, Abuja for the Saint Valentine's day.

have probably been dating over time or who just met and one is trying to 'woo' the other. This day is considered a perfect opportunity to make your spouse's day. Married couples are also not left out, although in this part of the world, they probably have

considerations for that special day which may not ordinarily be shown on any other day.

Trips may be planned away from home and work, to a more romantic setting like a leisure resort, or special dinners can be had

Flowers and common gifts like stuffed teddy bears, colourfully decorated cakes, perfumes, and jewellery change hands with the sole aim of expressing love or some emotion ranging from compassion, remorse and fondness to mention but a few.



Beautiful wrapped gifts for the Valentine on display beside Big Bites, Wuse II, Abuja

age, religion or race. It is also a day to show less privileged ones that they can be loved as well.

Here are some responses on what people think of Saint Valentine's day:

Mr. Timothy Lanzema, a resident of Wuse Zone 6, said that Valentine's day is one when people show love to the less privileged. "Most people

for people to show one another love. It is not necessarily a day for lovers alone. I believe it is a special day to show love to people all around you."

In Ogun State, Mr. Taiye Fatoki a.k.a. 'Lagbaja' said that Valentine is all about sharing your love with other especially the less privileged. "That is what I am going to

any other day."

A youth corps member serving in Abuja, AbdulAzeez Bello, said that he believes Saint Valentine's Day is a special day for friends and lovers to express their affection toward one another.

He, however, added that in the Nigerian context, people think about too many things to care much about the valentine.



Mr. Oladeji Yusuf



Mr. Timothy Lanzema



Bakeries and ice-cream spots like Oasis, Zone 4 are common places of attraction during the Valentine.

MUHAMMAD AL-GHAZALI

ON TUESDAY
tempthist@yahoo.com

Opinion

Re: The mother of all confabs...

M piece last week on the impending National Confab attracted lots of e-mails from readers. Rek Bassey, the President of the African Council on Narcotics was especially strong in his reaction. Excerpts from his piece reproduced below in italics, captures the bare essence of the raging debate in the polity ahead of the confab. My response, without order of precedence, is at the foot of the column:

I am an ardent reader of your column. Your usually intrepid, free-flowing styles, packed in incisive and powerful treatise often enthral me. However, your article, the one of 8 February 2005 to be precise, titled Before the Mother of All Confab... was pure bile. Every inch of the entire article seemed like a cake of fury basked in damning infuriation. If I had any doubt at all in my mind that many uncommon strings bind us as a nation, your article cleared that doubt. Needless to say you betrayed so much apprehension about the restructuring of the nation for details that were clearly spelt. One thing I must note, though, as one of your regular readers and admirer is that a wise man must be moderate. You did not have to pour so much venom on persons who were not in the position to make fundamental contribution to our nation state in the given circumstances. The core values of African tradition forbid us from humiliating or outraging sages, dead or alive.

That Nigeria is a nation of absurdities cannot be too accentuated. Such absurdities manifest everyday among individuals with self-opinionated mindsets, coloured by diverse influences. A frustrated military officer whose counterparts from northern Nigeria, who were perhaps less intellectually endowed than him, but for reason of quota system or federal character, had enjoyed favoured promotion and plum command appointment, would most likely have reacted the way that particular officer did to you in Ikeja. Never mind. I don't know him. But it is easy to infer. These things happen in our society. They will tell you promotion is based on merit. But is it really so? I know about a very brilliant southern officer, a regular combatant, who holds a Master's Degree and other qualifications who has remained with the same rank, his only problem being quota system, whereas his counterparts have been promoted over and over. Such an officer is down right aggrieved and knows that he is due to be retired soon. Do you expect him to smile with an "impolite northern civilian" who casually flags him to a chair with an air of disdain while concentrating on his phone call? For him that is unmitigated insolence. I could not agree more that our sense of belonging should not be sacrificed on the altar of mundane ethnic sentiments. Indeed, our collective mutual interests, well-being, welfare, benefit, happiness, security, survival and economic prosperity can only flourish

under an atmosphere of competence, merit and not mediocrity. For example, I don't really care if the next president will be a Zuru from Kebbi, a Kanuri from Maiduguri, a Bahamo-no from Cross River, a Mushere from Plateau or a Fulani from Adamawa so long as he is God fearing, sincere, detribalised, non-fanatical and not despotic. If I have any concern it with the recycling of leadership.

Truly, there is a lot of imbalance in our country, to say nothing of pervasive injustice. Or are you not aware of the discriminatory approaches to issues in social justice, appointments, crime and criminality and distribution of resources among others? For instance, why was Ken Saro-Wiwa killed while Zamani Lekwot is still alive today for a similar offence? Why was Alhaji Salisu Buhari granted presidential pardon for certificate forgery when several young men and women are languishing in police cells for examination malpractices all over Nigeria? Why was Alhaji Asari Dokubo, a terrorist, who by illegal means acquired several sophisticated weapons with which he killed scores of persons given presidential treatment? Yet, countless numbers of persons are decaying in detention for illegal possession of firearms. Tell me why a police constable should be dismissed and tried at all cost for collecting N20 at a checkpoint while his Inspector General who allegedly stashed away billions of Naira was merely retired and is currently circulating freely? How do we explain that the entire wealth of this country is in the hands of just about one percent of the entire population? Why? Why?? Why???

Try to juxtapose the gruesome murder and maiming of thousands of innocent souls among the Ijaws of Odi and the Tivs of Zaki-biam with the atrocities of the O'oduwa Peoples Congress in Yorubaland? You mentioned northern farmers with strong passion. But that is a luxury that some peasants in the Niger-Delta cannot afford. There is no justification either for building skyscrapers in Abuja at the expense of the eco-system and common means of livelihood in the Niger Delta. What is more, of all the geopolitical zones in this country the South-South remains the most marginalized. Yet it is said that the hen that lays the golden egg should be fed with golden feed. I do not know what they are going to discuss in the Mother of All Confab. But one thing I know is that we abide in injustice. And without justice, there shall be no peace.

Perhaps you will have the courage to publish my reaction in your column.

Well, first, Salisu Buhari was a creation of the Mr. President, for reasons not entirely dissimilar to his choice of Evan [s] Ewerem and Adolpus Wabara, over principled and more qualified men such as the late Chuba Okadigbo. Respect for the dead is also normal in any culture or tradition, but must I

change history simply because the facts happens to be detestable to certain sections of the society? The mere fact that Tai Solarin and Awo are now deceased, does not detract from the reality of their antecedents while they lived. I must also hasten to add that a man with a clear conscience needn't fear the verdict of history. I am hard on the likes of Soyinka because their idea of progressivism is hypocritical and does not extend beyond the promotion of ethnic chauvinism. You can't lay claim to democratic or progressive ideals and dine with the likes of Fredrick Faseun, or the Carpenter Ganiyu Adams at the same time.

Also, the assumption that Northern Officers were less intellectually endowed hints at the same type of Southern arrogance and prejudice I lampooned last week. Intellectual endowment after all, has no respect for geography or ethnicity while in the military, values such as leadership qualities, discipline, moral fibre, take precedence over academic scholarship or paper qualifications. Bassey may also not know it, but I also happen to be a minority from Niger state but the fact has never beclouded my sense of reason, neither have I ever considered it an inhibition. I am as aggrieved by the Odi massacre as I was saddened by what transpired at Zaki Biam while only the president and the Afenifere can explain why Ganiyu Adams and the his thugs in the OPC have become untouchables. When Abacha lived, they were hardly audible. But the good thing is that those who delight in riding on the back of the tiger [ethnicity, this time] ultimately end up in its deep bowels. If it were not so, Bola Ige would be alive today.

That aside, I see a clear contradiction in his reference to Alhaji Asari Dokubo as a terrorist. Like Saro Wiwa before him, is he not also marginalized? Has environmental degradation ceased in the Niger Delta? And, if the president, for obvious reasons, chooses to dance naked before his masters in Washington, London, or Paris, when treated the man like an emperor, why should I, the pampered, poorly educated Northerner be held accountable for his docility? On Lekwot, I am also entitled to wonder why OBJ is alive today while Vatsa my compatriot, was killed for a similar coup offence. But at least we are agreed on one thing: The task of eradicating hunger, disease and ignorance among our diverse peoples stretches far beyond the insipid or primitive allegiance to any ethno-geographical identity much as our quest for equity and justice should have no boundaries.

The situation in the Niger Delta is also no doubt an avoidable tragedy, but only the people of the region can explain the failure of successive alleviative programs since OMPADEC. Besides, just merely sitting on top of oil fields doesn't mean that they are more productive than the peasant farmer in the north, who toils day and night to ensure that food suppliers are available to his compatriot in the Niger Delta. Simplicita.

Open letter to late General Murtala

By Isa Muhammad Inuwa

DEAR General, it is about three decades since you bade your final farewell and bowed out of this chaotic and volatile world on February 13th 1976; to the great beyond. This writer was a junior pupil in primary school when you were assassinated in a bloody coup d'etat and you passed away in memorable martyrdom, which has created a yawning chasm yet unfilled in the circle of governance and leadership in Nigeria.

Since you passed away Mr. General, things have not been the same with this (our) world. It has been bloody, with the uni-polar dispensation since the demise of USSR in 1980's, United States of America remained the sole power and great war monger, putting checks and unfettered expansionism on world nations. After the fall of Berlin Wall in Germany and unification of West and Eastern Germany, the castration of Russian Socialism through introduction of Perestroika and end of ten years war between Iran and Iraq (1979-1989), America enjoyed self-attributed heroism, kind of a self-styled giant and introduced war in the Middle East region, (in the Gulf in 1991) which rages on to date.

At one time or the other the United States powers hunted down some head of states such as those of Haiti, Panama and Saddam Hussein of Iraq and put them to trial, to further prove America's usurped might to boss-over. War in the Gulf region assumed two big dimensions, the initial one being the "mother of all wars" declared by President George Bush of America with his coalition of over 30 countries on the nation of Iraq in 1991.

The second stage was a continuation carried over by George Bush Junior (son of former President Bush) in 2004, which led to the ouster and capture of President Saddam Hussein by American forces.

Mr. General after your passage, some African countries for whose independence you joined in the struggle, had finally got their independence. Namibia and Zimbabwe are free at last; likewise the South African Apartheid had lasted. Your comrade Nelson Mandela head of ANC was released from prison and made president of South Africa. Thereafter his lieutenant Mr. Thabo Mbeki is now the elected president.

But still, African nations continue to wallow in the set back of domination and under development as ethnic vendetta and wars for positions of power continue to rage and ravage such countries as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo Brazzaville, Congo Kinshasa, Somalia, and Sudan. In their usual antics some greater nations continue to support certain parties in these conflicts and supply weapons and similar gratifications thereby implanting and promoting their aggrandizement in these nations.

Mr. General, it may interest you to know that after your assassination by a clique of military Junta, second in command General Olusegun Obasanjo was pressed to step into your shoes and he handed over power successfully and willingly to a civilian regime in 1979. After the first four-year term of the first republic in 1983, your military colleagues moved to topple the ensuing tenure for second term of the civilian regime in 1984.

Only few months later, another group of military boys under General Ibrahim Babangida moved to oust General Buhari and Idiagbon's regime in 1985. Later in 1993, after eight years of administrative dilly-dally and unstoppable pressure of protest against annulment of June 12, 1992 elections, General Babangida stepped aside for an interregnum under Chief Ernest Shonekan. General Sani Abacha took over until his tragic death on throne in 1998 giving way to yet another interim under General Abdussalam who finally handed down to another civilian regime in May 1999.

Mr. General, it would interest you to know that your second man, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo had already clocked his first four-year term (1999-2003) and continued for the second term through a highly controversial general election in which former General Buhari (also bidding for presidency) on the platform of opposition party ANPP accused Obasanjo's party, PDP, of mass rigging and dragged the case before the court of law.

However, the urging desire for change and general refurbishing of the entire polity made some Nigerians to push General Buhari into politics and that was how it all ended up with him. Some people are claiming that Nigerian political climate is not yet conducive or sane enough to allow people of Buhari's caliber to the seat of presidency.

Mr. General; worst indeed, for all this long time you left, Nigeria the so-called giant of Africa, is still wobbling through the murky path of its labyrinth problems of bad leadership, poor economic plan, mass embezzlement of public treasury and misplacement of priorities. Although the country is still revered and respected for its abundant natural and human resources and its sacrifice for other African nations, yet it remains like a sleeping colossus or a white elephant, allowing its internal problems and difficulties with the common masses to loom sky-wards.

To mention but a few devastations of the country's economic structures through sheer negligence and misrule, sectors which you died and left intact such as the Nigerian Airways, Nigerian Railway Corporation, sustainable and large-scale agricultural system, sound and reliable educational system and viable and comprehensive free health care have all collapsed. It would pain you

further to know that Nigeria's major oil refineries are down to the extent that money from crude oil sales is swapped to purchase refined oil back for internal consumption. NEPA, the country's major electricity power supplying body is faced with similar fate and the epileptic nature of power supply has taken its toll on economic and industrial concerns.

At one time during last tenure of Chief Obasanjo, major government corporations and public utility companies such as NEPA, NNPC and NITEL were bided for sale to commercial outlets in the name of "privatization".

Worst still, Nigeria's NAIRA, which used to compete with the U.S. Dollar and Pound Sterling, is now devalued to the least exchange rate imagined. As a result, food items that sold cheaply in your days, now cost over hundred times the old price and the common man groans under the brunt of unbridled escalation of prices of essential commodities.

The educational sector that you had set on solid and viable foundation is now totally bastardized with university students no more enjoying free or subsidized feeding and laundry services. The students' hostels are heading for commercialization while students rent houses in the neighbourhood of universities. Perhaps the condition of universities was intentionally created to douse students' radicalism which is considered a threat to the powers that be; indeed the aim is achieved in that university students of nowadays, unlike your time Mr. General, are as docile as the lamb - they are more concerned with getting their certificates for which they suffered great financial exploitations, rather than bother to enlighten the public about their rights and duties as citizens.

Unlike university students of your time who matched on foot to several miles to mourn your death and continued to stage rallies for your remembrance during every anniversary of your death; today the students are made to forget or shun such radical activities, as educational standard is fast falling.

However, one good thing to know Mr. General is that your initiative of moving Nigeria's capital to Abuja has been realized under General Babangida's regime (1985-1993). The only set back is that the capital city is made an exclusive territory of powerful few politician leaders and big time bureaucrats rather than being a centre of unity and home of every Nigerian. Mr. General, if you were to reincarnate and return to Nigeria today and witness all these, your heart might bleed and you might die (again) from heart attack.

This indicates some wisdom in death; it is transfer to more honourable and peaceful condition in the hereafter, away from worldly woes particularly for men of virtue and good manner like you. Rest in peace!

Inuwa is correspondent, Radio Deutsche Welle.



YOUR LETTERS

The resignation of the National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP) Chief Audu Ogbeh, as tenaciously canvassed by some stalwarts of the party, makes the temptation to comment, on the crisis and other events in the party, irresistible. Agreed that it will be uncharitable to open old wounds, given the peace initiatives already started, it remains very compelling to reflect on some of the issues raised, along side the roles of some individuals.

Of particular concern to me, is the diatribe employed by the Governor of Adamawa state, Mr. Boni Haruna against his Nassarawa state counterpart, Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu, I regard the use of Uncouth language and other base references against a fellow chief Executive as most uncharitable and unbecoming of a leader.

From the tone of his advertised rejoinder, it was clear that Governor Abdullahi Adamu did not want to join issues with his fellow party man, neither did he want to degenerate to the use of gutter language to reply Boni Haruna. Musa Uzairu Lafia's equally advertised piece, ostensibly sponsored by Boni Haruna, However speaks volumes of the mindset of those opposed to Abdullahi Adamu.

Unfolding events in the crisis have tended to vindicate Abdullahi Adamu's position on some issues at the onset of the crisis. One of Governor Boni's open

Boni's diatribe against Adamu: Matters arising

grouse against Adamu, was the latter's call on Ogbeh to resign, as Chairman of the party and as Adviser to the President Audu Ogbeh resignation was an unmistakable response to that call. And if I read Adamu's lips very well, he has no regrets for canvassing that position, in the face of Ogbeh's roles in the crisis. I can also understand Boni's fears, should Ogbeh vacate the seat.

Musa Uzairu was too, most unfair to both the vice president and Governor Boni Haruna in his piece was insinuating that part of the crisis in the PDP has to do with trying to clip the wings of Atiku Abubakar or Boni Haruna.

I admire Musa Uzairu's level of intelligence in trying to draw analogies, but I must also state that his understanding of the interplay of forces in the march towards 2007 was bereft of the realities on ground. Rather than reason, he appears even more desperate in campaigning for the Vice President, than the Vice President himself, and in that desperation makes statements that were irrelevant to the issues in contention.

I have tried to restrain myself from degenerating to the level of Musa Uzairu, by avoiding uncouth words, but reading his piece, which from all material facts was

callous literacy exercise I have to re-fashion my language to suit the insensibilities of Uzairu's type. That he appeared to have allowed his name to be appended to a piece he neither has the intellectual capacity to author, nor the political clout to own, but just so that being from Nasarawa State he could lend colour to it, was a pity.

I appreciate Boni Haruna's position in the matter, and was not surprised by his actions. That Boni is mis-managing his borrowed glory, by making scathing remarks on other far older, more experienced and more endowed people than him is a pointer to a fast disappearing political value, known to the north for ages.

I want to close my case by pointing out that, descending on Abdullahi Adamu for expressing his opinions, or exhibiting loyalty to the President is uncalled for. If it is true that the crisis in the PDP is beyond what we know, I feel the likes of Boni Haruna should channel their energies towards unmasking the real issues at stake and addressing them.

When one reads Boni Haruna's interview of Christmas day, and Abdullahi Adamu's advertised rejoinder, one can not fail to distinguish their approaches to issues. While Boni appeared raw, immature and base, Abdullahi Adamu was

more diplomatic, cautious and mature. Musa Uzairu's follow up piece to Boni's interview was in the unmistakable fashion of the Boni's. It is rather a pity that Boni choose Abdullahi Adamu as the object of ridicule in his desperation to

prove his loyalty to the Vice President. It is needless elevating his loyalty to rascal.

In fact, Abdullahi Adamu did not need to respond to Boni's diatribes because Nigerians know the problems of the young man.

Here is a man, a political upstart catapulted into a position of responsibility without preparedness.

Usman Shehu Umar,
Department of Sociology,
Nassarawa State University,
Keffi

The meeting of columnists

I wish to comment on the Conference/seminar organised, by the Ministry of Information and National Orientation, for Nigeria columnists, at Bolingo Hotel and Towers, Abuja.

Though one did not attend the Conference, I watched part of the proceeding on television. I must confess that I am impressed by the Ministry's ability to bring together top columnists for the exchange of ideas, delivery of papers and establishment or deepening of the interface between the government and the critical mass of the media.

One is impressed by the attendance recorded and the conduct of the Minister of Information, Chief Chukwuemeka Chikelu's presence at the conference. This is a sign that the young, amiable Minister holds the press in high esteem. I say this because some government officials are in the habit of castigating the press as unpatriotic and agents of destabilisation, especially when they raise

issues pertaining to good governance.

Whether we like it or not, the media and journalists are on ground as the fourth Estate of the Realm. They are the watchdogs in the society. You may consider how important they are when you remember the part they played in the enthronement of democracy. Even today, they remain one of the most critical segments of the present democracy. Their criticisms help to keep those in government on their feet.

We congratulate the Minister for his foresight in hosting columnists, we ask him to make such seminars as part of the Ministry's strategy of disseminating

information. Thus, this calls for the organisation of such seminars once in a while.

Recall that the Minister's Special Assistant, Dr. Okey Ikechukwu spoke at the seminar on the "The Columnist and Nigeria's Image." By explaining the import of the image project, the media is now well-positioned and informed on the project. Such information will certainly provide factual information to those who may wish to write on the project. This is encouraging because in the absence of such information, gossip, rumour and misinformation will take over.

Benedict Okelade,
University of Lagos, Lagos.

Haba Trust newspapers!

With all due respect to the management of media Trust for providing balanced, courageous and trustworthy newspapers, I however believe the Eastern part of this country is marginalized in terms of coverage.

You have "EKO TRUST" and "KANO TRUST", I am yet to see "ENUGU" or "elsewhere Trust".

Please do something about this "blackout" for the Eastern part.

Iliyasu Jega
No 16, Dutsinma Street,
Tudun Wada Kaduna.



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Opinion

Yobe as theatre of the absurd

Given that governance, especially that of a whole state is but a complex inter-play of processes and procedures in which are involved individuals and institutions that operate within given norms, values and mores, it becomes easy to understand why Yobe state has today been reduced to a theatre of the absurd, a stage in which all conceivable tragicomedy is played out.

The story of Yobe is indeed a sad one. Of all the 36 states of our federation, the state stands out as the most intriguing. It is one of the least, if not the least developed parts of Nigeria, where the people live in a stone, if you like dinosaurian ages. The living standard of Yobeans is among the lowest in Nigeria by whatever indices of measurement. Yet it is the state, whose Governor, Bukar Abba Ibrahim has collected more certificates of honour and chieftaincy titles presumably on account of his "high level performance" than any public office holder since the commencement of the present democratic dispensation. Most remarkable, I would rather say laughable, is the *Best Governor in Africa* (whatever that means) award bestowed on him by a non-descript, faceless, South African commercial outfit.

Today, Yobe state presents two contradicting realities. There is on the one hand a reality of a people overwhelmed by poverty, squalor, illiteracy and disease. On the other hand, is a leader of the people, so-called best that not only Nigeria, but Africa has produced in recent times. When you have a state being governed by such a rare breed

By Garba Abari

of *Homo sapiens*, paradise should naturally be the second name of such a state. These contradicting realities are what make Yobe State an interesting phenomenon in that it has become the weakest link in our democratic chain. No doubt, such a scenario is laden with lots of danger to our quest for sustainable development and institutionalization of genuine democracy.

The gory picture of Yobe state that emerges out of these contradicting realities depicts a graphic attestation to what obtains whenever power loses its most essential quality - Moral authority. Paucity of moral authority in the exercise of power invariably leads to its personification and the effects of the personification of power do not only stop at the level of the individual but extend to and kill institutions and compromise values.

With the least literacy level in this country, it is very disheartening to note and certainly not an exaggeration to say that between 45% - 50% of children of school going-age in Yobe are out of school. Most disturbing is the fact that these children are fast becoming street urchins and willing tools in the hands of unscrupulous politicians who use them to perpetrate all sorts of despicable actions. The few children that remain in the contraptions that are called schools are but an upcoming generation of boys and girls who have been reduced to a rural version of "area boys". Today, except for the children of Yobe indigenes who live in other parts of the country and those of the state's

top civil servants who school in neighbouring Borno, Jigawa and Kano states, very few children who go to schools in the state can sit for and pass the requisite examinations for entry into tertiary institutions.

When recently the Nigerian Union of Journalists honoured Governor Bukar with an award of excellence for his achievements in the field of education among other things, my heart missed a beat and I asked myself in desperation what must have become of investigative journalism. I implore the journalists, representatives of the Fourth Estate of Realm, not to withdraw the award bestowed on Governor Bukar, but to please pay a visit to Government Science and Fika Government Secondary Schools in Potiskum, Government Secondary Schools in Nguru, Gashua, Geidam and Damaturu. I mentioned these schools because they are the oldest schools in the state and have produced high-class products that today hold various positions of responsibility in both the private and public sectors of the polity. The Union of journalists may not have to withdraw the award, but aftermath of their visit to these schools will surely leave them with a feeling of being unenviable promoters of the debasement of our hitherto cherished values, notwithstanding the contents of the brown envelopes. Ever heard of a science laboratory without water, chemicals and reagents? Come to think of it, can you ever conceive of a secondary school classroom without a blackboard? Please

go to Yobe schools.

Yobe hospitals do not merit being called "mere consulting clinics", for they not only lack the qualified personnel but even the most basic things that make a hospital. In Nguru, Gashua, Geidam, Damaturu and Potiskum General Hospitals, patients coming on admission must bring along among other items a mat, because of lack of hospital beds, a pail of water, a pillow and wait for this, a lantern lamp or torchlight in case an ailment or a woman's prolonged labour would necessitate a surgery during the night! Yours sincerely has had a feel of the state of Yobe hospitals when during one of my recent trips home, I went to the General Hospital Potiskum in search of remedy to what I thought was a malaria attack. I leave you to your imaginations!

With a crop of civil servants that are neither civil in demeanor nor servants in disposition, a political elite that is opportunistic and essentially self-serving and bereft of any semblance of commitment to the progress of the state, and worse of all, a visionless government whose only stock in trade is heeding to the destructive voice of sycophants and praise singers, Yobe state, today, is but the village square where the dancers dance anyhow and the drums are beaten anyhow. Where such a situation obtains, chaos and disorder are the natural results. So much have things gone out of control that nobody in Yobe now can hold anybody responsible for what is done or not done with public funds simply because, order, procedures and due process have all been thrown to the

dogs. The Governor is the Executive, the Legislature, the party and the Local Government Chairmen all put in one. Nothing explains this gross Executive arrogance but the personification of power and the seeming comatose stage into which all possible outlets of opposition have been thrown.

The state Legislature, that arm of government which is constitutionally empowered to check and balance the Executive is comprised of only those that the Governor has appointed, sorry selected. Not only does this organ of government lack the institutional capacity to perform even the most mundane of its functions - oversight, it has become part and parcel of the charade that is called governance in the state. Between January 2004 to the present, the Governor has spent hundreds of millions of naira gallivanting all about the place in hired jets with a retinue of village never-do-wells, for one chieftaincy title or the other while the taps in Damaturu the state capital remain without a drop of water. While this crazy merry go round is taking place, the entire Legislature and its bureaucracy have become permanently on the Governor's entourage, falling over one another to get one Executive favour or the other.

For sure, the bucks stops at Bukar Abba's table, but we the elites are no less guilty. In fact, Yobe like it or not is our collective failure. Pursuit of personal self-aggrandisement has wrecked the PDP leadership and its major stakeholders thereby rendering it completely ineffectual as an

opposition party. As educated people who have eaten and drunk freely from public coffers, we have failed by refusing to speak up while this brigandage is taking place before our very eyes.

We have taken refuge in indifference because our children don't go to Yobe schools nor do we go to Yobe hospitals when we are ill. With all the unprincipled pretensions to Islamic orthodoxy neither the *Ulamaa*, Bukar's willing ally in the hypocritical appeal to the religious sentiments of a largely uninformed gullible populace nor the traditional rulers, the supposed vanguard of the peoples' welfare deem it fit to either fight this injustice or to dislike it from the inner recesses of their hearts talk less of leading a resistance to dislodge it.

Unless we develop our democratic institutions and make them perform the roles expected of them, unless we learn to hold public officials accountable for their actions or inaction, our quest for good governance will continue to be a mirage. The resultant effect of this is despair and cynicism among the citizenry. A cynical citizenry is but a missing leg in the democratic stand. Cynicism and despair have for long reared their ugly heads in the affairs of Yobe, that is why the state has become a theatre of the absurd, a very weak link in our democratic chain. We mustn't allow the situation to go beyond this, even as it is, its bad, worse? enough.

Abari writes from
No.1, Turaki Street,
Kasuwar NPN, Potiskum,
Yobe State.

Beyond the criticisms against Goje

In about five recent editions of this newspaper, Gombe state governor Alhaji danjuma Goje has been a subject of heated debate. For those that have heavily criticised him, they need to be educated on many counts.

Campaign promises are solemn assurance of doing certain things for people by politicians in their struggle to win their votes. Politicians often make these promises with ease but end up doing little or nothing to keep their promises after finding their ways into position of authority. However, quite a few of them try as much as possible to live up to expectation in the belief that, keeping their promise makes them leaders not rulers.

From the beginning to the end of Goje's campaign tour of nooks and crannies of promises where ever he visited and vowed to fulfil them in order of priority. The problems of the people, which later formed his programme of action, will serve as the directive principle and

By Hussaini Umar Idris,

policy of his administration which he presented to the people of the state before taking over the mantle of leadership. This programme of action contained all his campaign promises anamely;- Provision of potable water, rural electrification, construction of urban and rural roads, educational development, healthcare delivery, provision of agricultural Infrastructure, improvement of commerce and industries, construction of Gombe airport and ensuring social security.

Being appointee of Gombe State Government, I decided to embark on a soul searching or indept introspection for a midterm assessment of the government of which I am a part. I feel I owe the heavily criticised a duty of honesty and sincerity; a duty to protect his integrity and a duty to assist him in carrying the Herculean and tortuous act of governance through advice and supply of information about the

government.

Here are some of my findings: <

His stance is clear and constant. He shares the sorrow of the people, understand their difficulties and anticipate their wants and only set himself above them in carrying responsibilities.

As a palliative measure, water tankers were purchased to distribute water in Gombe metropolis and environs pending the completion of Gombe regional water project. And many boreholes have been sunk in all the eleven local government areas of the State.

A number of roads were constructed with good drainages. These include the dualization of Tumfure-Liji road, six major township roads, Bage roads, Balanga Bridge, Moron Bridge, roads in Shongom and Balanga local government with many others under construction.

Gombe General Hospital has been rehabilitated and upgraded to a specialist hospital and equipped with state-of-the-art facilities. New general

hospitals were constructed in Deba and Funakaye while Billiri, Kaltungo and Dukku general hospitals were rehabilitated. Moreover, all hospitals in the state are in full supply of drugs and equipments.

The Gombe State University has been established with all the necessary facilities of a modern university whose admission exercise is now on course. Government has also established School of Nursing and Midwifery in Gombe, Vocational training schools across the state and rehabilitated a number of secondary schools.

Preparation for the construction of the Gombe Airport is in earnest. Compensation has been paid to farmers affected by the Airport site.

He has been working hand-in-hand with all security agencies in the state to ensure security of life and property and has done a lot in quelling the menace of Udawa and armed robbers.

This result is so encouraging and a big source of pride to me

so much that I use to think, nobody should criticize this government. But this is not to be because, some people are already busy attacking the government left, right and centre.

Well, it is not least expected that the governor will be on collision course with many people, ranging from those who did not do anything when they were in power and those who don't want him to do anything, so that he will be subject of public bashing, to those who feel if he executes projects, there will be nothing left for their self aggrandizement.

One thing I am sure of is that, he is aware of these detracting and distracting critics and will not yield to them in the same manner as prescribed by, Aaidh Ibn Abdullah Al-Qarni who said in his book; 'Don't be sad': "you will always have to face criticism which in its onslaught is like an intermittent war. As long as you shine, give, produce and have an effect upon others, disapproval and condemnation will be your lot in life. . . . And

here is something you should contemplate: a person who is sitting on the ground does not fall and people do not kick a dead dog. Their anger towards you can be attributed to your surpassing them in righteousness, knowledge, manners or wealth. So remain firm and patient when facing their insult and criticism. If you are wounded by their words and let them have influence over you, you will have realized their hope for them. Instead, forgive them by showing them the most beautiful of manners. Their disapproval of you only increases you in worth and merit.

All I say is more of developmental projects, more of financial discipline, more of commitment to people's welfare and more of social justice in the remaining years ahead. I am sure that God is on his side come 2007, as to propel his campaign train back to Government House.

Idris, is Personal Assistant (Liaison) to the governor

Trust International

Africa

Thousands flee DR Congo in fresh fighting

About 80,000 people have been displaced by fighting in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo this year, according to UN officials.

They said nearly half have fled Ituri region in the last four days.

Ituri is highly unstable, despite the presence of UN peacekeepers and a peace agreement designed to end Congo's five-year civil war.

The UN has warned of a humanitarian crisis in the region.

Officials from the organisation said many of the newly displaced have travelled long distances on foot, taking with them only what they can carry.

UN peacekeepers have deployed in three new towns in recent weeks to try to protect civilians from attack.

But as they have done so, more people have arrived from surrounding areas seeking their protection.

Aid agencies are providing food, water and medical care in the areas safe enough to access.

The rebels were supposed to join the national army.

The displacement follows renewed clashes between militias from the Hema and Lendu ethnic groups.

These groups have continued to fight for control over Ituri's natural resources, despite the official end of Congo's civil war two years ago.

Congo's neighbours, Rwanda and Uganda, have been accused in the past of using the local militias as proxies, to further their own interests in the region.



Thabo Mbeki

Mbeki condemns Togo transition, warns Cote d'Ivoire

transition, warns Cote d'Ivoire

President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa has condemned the leadership transition in Togo, warning that it should send a message to the people of Côte d'Ivoire on the urgency of resolving their crisis.

In the section of his state of the nation address dealing with foreign relations, Mbeki said the "unconstitutional charade" in which President Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo was succeeded by his son, Faure Gnassingbe, added to instability in West Africa.

He added: "This must communicate the message to the people of Côte d'Ivoire and the rest of our continent that everything must be done to solve the Ivorian crisis, given the importance of this country, which has the third-largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa."

Mbeki reiterated firmly that South Africa would "continue to contribute" to helping Ivorian leaders and people "implement all the necessary steps to end the crisis in their country, creating the possibility for the holding of democratic presidential elections in October this year in a unified country."

He also expressed the commitment the South African government to work with "the government and people of Zimbabwe" to ensure that next month's elections are free and fair.

Mbeki said South Africa would work as part of the Southern African Development Community in pursuance of free and fair elections. Tensions between the South African government and Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change have eased slightly since a meeting

between Mbeki and MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai, and the MDC is taking part in the elections.

He added that South Africa would help the neighbouring kingdom of Swaziland "where we can" to develop a broadly-acceptable constitutional dispensation; and

Mbeki's cautious reference to Swaziland comes against a background of deepening tensions between unions and civil society activists demanding democracy and the autocratic monarchy run by King Mswati III, who has recently indulged in flagrantly violent

spending.

He highlighted South Africa's role in convening the African Union's sub-committee on the reconstruction of Sudan, in engaging the government of Somalia in reconstituting its state, and in working with the AU, the Caribbean Community and the United Nations towards elections in Haiti later this year.

Deposed Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, living in exile as a guest of the South African government, was in the chamber for Mbeki's address. Another guest was former president Nelson Mandela, celebrating the 15th anniversary of his release from prison.

EU urges restraint over Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute

The European Union (EU) expressed concern yesterday over "the recent military build-up" by Ethiopia and Eritrea and urged both sides not to ignite another war in the Horn of Africa.

The Dutch ambassador, Rob Vermaas, whose country currently holds the EU presidency, said the 25-nation body was "particularly concerned" about the build-up near the border.

"The EU is particularly concerned about the recent military build-up on both sides of the border and urges both sides to refrain from any action that could lead to a resumption of hostilities," he said in a statement read on behalf of the EU.

Vermaas added that development support to Ethiopia could be "directly influenced" by political and

governance issues, citing the unresolved border dispute with neighbouring Eritrea.

"In this context, the EU would like to reiterate its firm commitment to assist Ethiopia and Eritrea in finding a way forward to implementing the decision of the Boundary Commission," he said.

His comments came as Prime Minister Meles Zenawi presented the government's annual economic progress report to donors and appealed for more aid to help reduce poverty.

In the second annual progress report on Ethiopia's three-year poverty reduction programme, Meles said the two most important challenges facing his country were the availability of resources and poor implementation of strategies to combat poverty.

UN appeals for more Sudan funds

The United Nations said it has received just a fraction of the money it needs to help refugees from Sudan's civil war return to their homes.

Just \$3.6m (£1.9m) has been donated towards the initial total of \$30m (£16m) which has been appealed for.

Over half a million people fled south Sudan into neighbouring countries during the civil war which ended with a peace agreement a month ago.

Millions are hoping to return following the end of the 21-year north-south war.

Over 500,000 southerners returned home last year as the drawn-out peace talks progressed.

With the signing of a final agreement ending the conflict last month, millions more are expected.

The bulk of Sudan's displaced people are within the country's vast borders but 600,000 sought shelter in camps in neighbouring countries such as Uganda and Kenya.

Now with peace, has come the opportunity to return but international funding has not been easy to find. Less than \$4 million has so far been promised.

Wendy Chamberlain, deputy high commissioner for the UN's refugee agency, said: "The focus has been tsunami: 'The needs are here, the needs are Africa, the needs are south Sudan and Darfur but we need to get that message out as well. I think that the generosity of people throughout the world is very high. But we need to bring the story to them.'"

The UN has stopped short of urging refugees and internally displaced people to return home.

Southern Sudan is one of the poorest in the world

with little infrastructure and appalling standards of health care and schooling.

As people continue to return the challenge initially will be just to maintain the existing low standard of living.

Meanwhile, a Sudanese minister has said that 700 prisoners of war held by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement would be freed by the end of this week.

Kenya's Kibaki defends corruption record

Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki has rejected suggestions that he has lost the political will to fight corruption.

"There should be no doubt in anybody's mind about our commitment to winning the fight against graft," he said.

These were his first comments since fresh allegations were made about the scale of corruption and the resignation of his chief anti-graft adviser.

Mr Kibaki was elected in 2002 on a pledge to clean up Kenya, but diplomats say "massive looting" continues.

"We recognise that this fight [against corruption] is vital for the performance of the economy and improvement of the welfare of Kenyans," he said.

"It is therefore a war we are determined to win."

Mr Kibaki did not, however, mention the latest allegations directly, or the resignation of anti-corruption adviser John Githongo.

On Thursday, the president ordered an inquiry into corruption.

An audit of the security contract bidding process was launched last year after protests over a \$34m deal given to a French firm.

The report has revealed details about how contracts are awarded, that Mr Kibaki says must be examined.

Two ministers have threatened to resign and Vice-President Moody Awori admits there is "massive corruption" at senior levels.

Mr Kibaki said the audit had raised questions, and told Kenya's anti-corruption commission "to move with speed and act appropriately... to ensure there is no loss of government funds".

Health Minister Charity Ngilu said that if corrupt ministers did not leave, the entire cabinet should be sacked.

Most donors cut off aid under former President Daniel arap Moi, citing corruption. They restored funding under Mr Kibaki.

Recently, UK High Commissioner to Kenya Sir Edward Clay said "massive looting" was continuing and that he knew of at least 20

...Morocco arrests soldiers over sex scandal

Six Moroccan soldiers serving as UN peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been arrested over sex abuse claims, Moroccan officials said.

The head of the Moroccan contingent of UN peacekeepers and his deputy have also been relieved of their duties.

The move follows an inquiry by the UN into repeated allegations that its peacekeepers in DR Congo have sexually exploited and abused women and girls.

The six were sent as part of a UN force meant to protect civilians.

Instead it is alleged that the peacekeepers sexually abused Congolese children.

The Moroccan government's announcement of their arrest was immediately welcomed by the UN mission in Congo.

The spokesman, Mamadou Bah, said the organisation hoped the action taken by Morocco would serve as an example to all nations contributing troops in DR Congo.

The allegations over the past year that peacekeepers have sexually exploited women and girls, including bribing children with food in return for sex, have been highly damaging for the UN.

Last month a team investigated 72 allegations of abuse by UN peacekeepers and civilian staff. Twenty-six of these were substantiated.

In response, the UN introduced a non-fraternisation policy, banning its peacekeepers from having sex with local people.

But UN officials stressed they have no power to discipline peacekeepers.

They can only send them home and request that the country of origin takes action.

And it is only when countries like Morocco prosecute offenders, they say, that sexual abuse by peacekeepers can be stamped out.

Trust International

Middle East & Asia

Iraqi Shi'ah move to form coalition

Moves to form a new government are under way in Iraq after the announcement of full election results.

The Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) said it wants to name a new prime minister after it was confirmed as winning nearly half the vote.

However the bloc will not have a parliamentary majority on its own. Kurdish groups, which came second, are seen as potential partners.

The process of forming a coalition is likely to take several weeks.

The finance minister in the interim government, Adel Abdel Mahdi, is widely tipped as the UIA's candidate for prime minister.

"Iraq is bleeding and we need everybody at this juncture to work for solidarity and unity," Mr Abdel Mahdi told Arabic TV channel *al-Arabiya*.

He added that his alliance which is backed by Iraq's most senior Shia Muslim cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani - was "seeking to realise a wide national harmony" in choosing key positions.

The new parliament will be tasked with writing a constitution, and the representation of the Shia bloc falls far short of the two-thirds majority needed for that.

The BBC's correspondent in Baghdad said there are many deals to be done in the coming weeks.

The Kurds have called for one of their leaders to become president.

According to results released by Iraq's election commission on Sunday, 58% of registered Iraqis turned out to vote in the 30 January

poll and the Shia alliance took 48% of ballots cast.

A secular list led by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi got 14%, while ethnic Kurdish parties won 26%. Meanwhile, U.S.-backed interim prime minister may have been pummeled at the polls, but Ayad Allawi is likely to still play a key role in the new government.

Allawi still secured a seat in the 275-member National Assembly, however — and more importantly, he is expected to hold a position in the new government.

The Shiites, with their 48 percent share, will be forced to reach out to other groups to form a government, and Allawi is expected to play a key role in the negotiations and end up with an influential role.

...Turkey expresses concern over vote

Turkey urged Iraqi electoral officials and the United Nations to examine what it claimed were skewed Iraqi elections results released Sunday, saying it was particularly concerned about vote tallies in the oil-rich and ethnically mixed city of Kirkuk.

Turkey has long complained that Kurdish groups were illegally moving Kurds into Kirkuk, a strategic northern city, in an effort to tip the city's population balance in their favour.

Turkish officials did not make direct reference to the Kurds on Sunday, but the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement that voter turnout in some regions was low and charged that there were "imbalanced results" in several regions, including Kirkuk. "It has emerged that



Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. A Shi'ite alliance won Iraq's first election since Saddam Hussein's overthrow, sealing the new political dominance of the country's long-oppressed majority.

certain elements have tried to influence the voting and have made unfair gains from this," the statement said, in an apparent reference to the Kurds. "As a result the Iraqi Interim Parliament won't reflect the true proportions of Iraqi society."

Ankara fears that Kurdish domination of Kirkuk and oil fields near the city would make a Kurdish state in northern Iraq viable. Such a state, Turkish officials warn, could further inspire Turkey's own rebellious Kurds, who have been battling the Turkish army in southeastern Turkey since 1984.

Hoshiyar Zebari, a Kurd who is Iraq's interim foreign minister, said Turkey had no cause for concern over strong Kurdish showing in Iraq's elections.

"Definitely all their fears are misplaced," he told CNN. "Iraq will remain united. This Kurdish participation in this Iraqi elections and in the regional election is reaffirmation of their commitment to a national unity of the country."

He said Kurds were seeking a democratic and pluralistic within a federal and united Iraq.

"There is no conspiracy here," he said. "Turkey should have no fears whatsoever about the future of Iraq remaining a friendly country to them, united but respecting the diversity of Iraqi society."

The Turkish statement called on the election board to seriously consider objections to the vote and urged the United Nations to take a "more active role" and ensure that "the flaws, the disorder and irregularities" of the poll were not repeated when Iraqis vote on a new constitution later this year.

Iraq's majority Shiite Muslims won nearly half the

votes in the Jan. 30 election, giving the community significant power but not enough parliamentary seats to form a government on its own.

Two key Kurdish parties gained just over a quarter of votes cast, giving them considerable support in the national assembly to preserve Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq.

Sharon orders crackdown on extremists

Responding to death threats against government ministers, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered law enforcement agencies Sunday to crack down on Jewish extremists opposed to the planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Cabinet ministers said the charged climate is reminiscent of the period before the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin who was in peace negotiations with the Palestinians. One minister warned Sharon himself could become a target. Extremists have put up posters across the country that say Rabin and the prime minister's deceased wife, Lily, are "waiting for Sharon."

Despite the concerns, Sharon's Cabinet approved a list of 500 Palestinian prisoners to be released in coming days, and several hundred Palestinian workers were permitted to return to jobs in Israel in line with agreements reached at a Mideast summit last week.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, was to present a new Cabinet to his Fatah movement for approval on Sunday. Abbas was expected to appoint new interior, foreign and information ministers but keep on many current

government members, officials said.

In an upbeat interview to be published in Monday's edition of *The New York Times*, Abbas said the war with the Israelis is effectively over and that Sharon is speaking "a different language" to the Palestinians.

Abbas spoke proudly of persuading the radical groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad to respect the truce he and Sharon announced last Tuesday at their first meeting, in Sharm el Sheik, Egypt — the highest-level meeting between Israelis and Palestinians in four years.

"Today our comrades in Hamas and Jihad said they are committed to the truce, the cooling down of the whole situation, and I believe we will start a new era," Abbas told the newspaper.

Israeli officials have voiced concerns about Jewish extremist opposition to the pullout plan for months. But with this summer's planned withdrawal quickly approaching and a recent warming of ties with the Palestinians, the level of alarm has been raised. Sharon instructed law enforcement agencies to report back to the Cabinet as soon as possible with steps that can be taken to "rein in the violent rampage" of extremists opposing his plan, a statement said.

Explosion in Lebanon kills six

An explosion apparently targeting and killing former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's motorcade ripped through downtown Beirut on Monday, killing at least six people, witnesses and a politician said.

Lebanon's most internationally known politician was unharmed, legislator Basses Yamout told *The Associated Press* from the scene.

Yamout said he did not speak to Hariri himself but said another politician had spoken to Hariri afterward.

Witnesses at the scene said Hariri's motorcade was hit. Local media said some of the bodyguards were among the casualties.


TV footage from the scene showed the devastated front of a building and flames leaping from several cars. A burning person struggled to get out of a car via the window, fell on the ground and was helped by a bystander who used his

jacket to put out the flames.

Explosions in Beirut — while common during the 1975-90 civil war — have become rare since the conflict ended. However, in October, amid rising tension between the opposition and the government, a car bomb seriously injured an opposition politician and killed his driver in Beirut.

The blast severely damaged at least one large building, the facade of which was blown off, covering cars, sidewalks and the street with rubble. Heavily armed security forces cordoned off the area with yellow tape as rescue workers and investigators combed the scene apparently looking for casualties or clues to what caused the huge explosion.

The explosion near the city's waterfront shortly before noon shook buildings in the city center and was heard in outlying hills overlooking the Lebanese capital.



The Presidency
NATIONAL POVERTY ERADICATION PROGRAMME (NAPEP)

RE: SUSPENSION OF THE INVITATION TO PRE-QUALIFY FOR THE SUPPLY OF AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FARMERS' EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME OF NAPEP

Our advertisement in the Daily Trust and Thisday newspapers of Tuesday, October 12, 2004 refers.

We regret to inform the numerous companies that responded to the invitation for pre-qualification on the suspension of the procurement process.

In view of the suspension, all the companies that responded to the invitation to pre-qualify are hereby invited to come forward to retrieve their documents and the tender fee paid to NAPEP account.

For the retrieval, the authorized nominee of a tenderer shall present a letter of authority of the company carrying a passport photograph of the authorized nominee on the company's letterhead as well as appropriate identification.

A tenderer shall forward application for the retrieval and introduction of there named nominee to the Permanent Secretary for the attention of the Director (MMIS).

Inconveniences caused by the suspension are highly regretted.

Signed:
Permanent Secretary

Trust International

World Reports

No independence for Kosovo - Serbian president

Serbian president Boris Tadic has rejected calls for Kosovar independence while on an official visit to Serbia's southern province.

His visit to Kosovo on Sunday marked the first time a Serbian head of state has entered Kosovo since it became a UN protectorate at the end of the 1998-1999 war.

"I am against the independence of Kosovo and for me, it is unacceptable. I will never accept such a solution," Tadic told some 2000 Serbs gathered to greet him in the central Kosovo town Strpce.

Tadic said his trip was de-

signed to remind the world of the plight of Serbs in Kosovo, the historic heartland of Serbian culture and religion. The visit comes before long-awaited talks on Kosovo's final status, expected to start later this year under UN auspices.

Kosovo Albanians demand independence but Belgrade insists that the province remains part of Serbia.

Speaking to the Serbian state television from the village Velika Hoca, Tadic said he had invited UN Kosovo chief Soren Jessen-Petersen to visit Belgrade "to work to-

gether on solving problems" in Kosovo.

"The Serbs here live in isolation which seems insurmountable. The only thing we can do is to give our utmost to overcome this difficult situation," Tadic said.

More than 200,000 Serbs have fled Kosovo since the UN took control at the end of the war, when ethnic Albanian separatists battled Serbian forces under then-Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic.

Avalanche kills five in Greece

A British journalist and four Greek climbers have been killed in an avalanche in the southern Peloponnese mountains in Greece.

Athens-based reporter Diana Seale and the others were in a group of 28 on Mount Menalos when they were caught in the avalanche.

The 23 other climbers escaped with minor injuries.

Officials said heavy snow and thick fog made access to the area difficult and hampered rescue efforts.

A helicopter, 50

In Pristina, police cordoned off the UN headquarters during the meeting between Tadic and Petersen as a small group of protesters demanded Serbia account for people still listed as missing from the war.

Demonstrators tried to pelt Tadic with eggs, but local police surrounded him and safely took him out from the UN compound. Two demonstrators were detained, police said.

"I did not come with a magic wand. I wish I did, but I can promise you that I will use all my powers and authority to fight for the rights of our people and every citizen living in Kosovo," Tadic told the villagers.

firefighters, soldiers, policemen and trained dogs were involved in the operation.

Ms Seale, 31, worked for the English-language edition of the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*.

The climbers, who set off for the mountain near Tripoli on Sunday, were members of the Greek Mountaineering Club of Athens.

Reports said the avalanche is thought to have happened when the group was at 1,500m (4,920 ft) and on the way down the mountain.

Odd World

Station offers free valentine's divorce

Cupid occasionally misses his mark, so a local radio station is running a Valentine's Day contest offering a free divorce. "Everyone associates Valentine's Day with love, and diamonds, chocolate, roses. But what about those people that hate it. This is for those people," said Scott Petibone, program director at WKRL-FM, a progressive rock station heard in Syracuse and Utica.

The station, known as *K-Rock*, began promoting its divorce-giveaway Monday. By Thursday, the station received over 100 entries, Petibone said. A winner will be selected on Valentine's Day.

Although some contestants are offering explicit explanations of why they want a divorce, Petibone said none is necessary. However, the divorce must be uncontested.

"We're not looking for the most horrible stories or the most vicious couples," he said.

The free divorce will be handled by lawyer Brad Margolis. A divorce without custody issues, where both husband and wife want to split and agree on how to divide their assets, costs at least \$1,390 - about \$1,000 in legal fees and \$390 in state filing costs, he said.

"That's a lot of money for a paper-pushing exercise. In a lot of these cases, people just want to make legal something that is already done," Margolis said, noting the national divorce rate is over 50 percent.

In Syracuse, some clergy called the contest tasteless. "A divorce is a death, the death of a dream," said the Rev. Joseph Champlin, rector at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. "You wouldn't make a joke out of someone who died, would you?"

Birds crashland after getting drunk

Dozens of birds, drunk from eating holly berries, crashed into the glass of an office building and died earlier this week.

"It was like an Alfred Hitchcock movie," worker Denise Wilkinson said. "It was spooky. You could hear them where they flew into the glass."

Warm weather and an ample supply of berries attracted hundreds of cedar waxwings into the enclosed courtyard of the three-story building Tuesday, the birds began getting drunk on the berries. They got so loopy that some were falling off branches and others were slamming into the glass walls that enclose the courtyard, said Burgess Mills, the building's owner. About half of the 100 birds that slammed into the building died, workers said.



Serbian president, Boris Tadic



BIRAK CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

The entire management and staff of

Birak Construction Company wish to rejoice and

congratulate His Excellency The Jigawa State Governor

Alh. Ibrahim Saminu Turaki on his conferment of the

Prestigious honorary Doctorate Degree of Science

by the Senate of the University of Jos.



In recognition of his unequalled contribution in

the field of information and communication

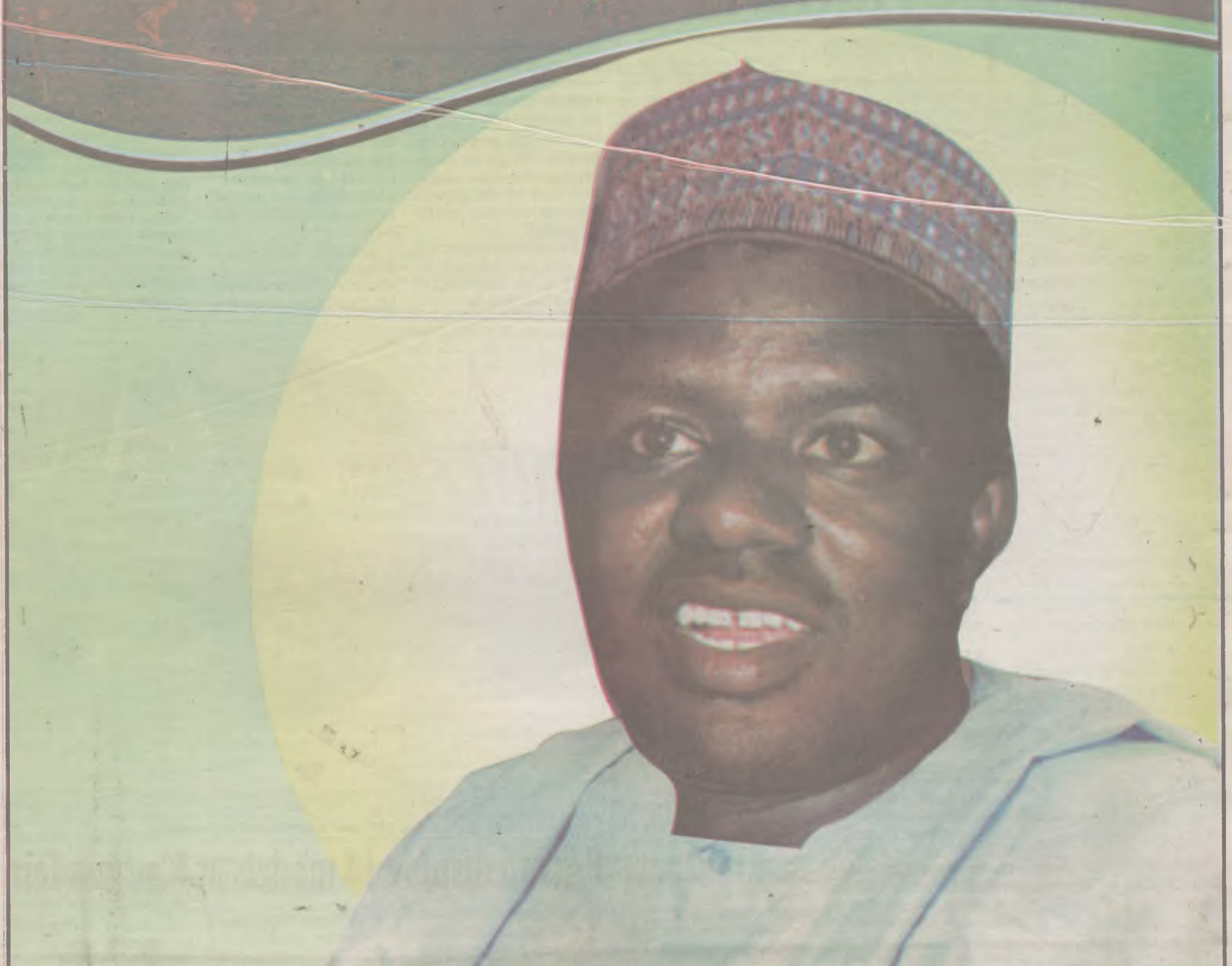
technology in Nigeria and West Africa.



Alh. Saminu Turaki
Jigawa State Governor

Signed:
Managements

A worthy honour



His Excellency,
Alhaji Ibrahim Saminu Turaki
Executive Governor, Jigawa State

This prestigious honour is an eloquent testimony of your immense contributions to the development of information and communication technology in Nigeria and West Africa.

The Board of Directors, Management and Staff of
TROPICAL COMMERCIAL BANK PLC
rejoice with the Executive Governor of Jigawa State

His Excellency, ALHAJI (DR.) IBRA

on his conferment with an
honourary degree of **Doctor of Science** by the University of Jos.
We wish you many more years of fruitful service to your fatherland.



TROPICAL COMMERCIAL BANK PLC

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Simply Dependable

Business Trust

Motoring

Leyland resumes operations soon

By Ahmed I. Shekarau,
Group Business Editor

There are indications that Leyland Automobile Assembly Plant shut down ten years ago may soon resume operations as both the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) and the Oyo State government have begun the process of resolving the impasse between Eba-Odan Investment and the federal government over the sale of government's shares in the company.

To this end, the Director General of BPE, Dr. Julius Bala, and Governor Rasheed Ladoja of Oyo State as well as representatives of Eba-Odan met for two hours last Thursday at the BPE office in Abuja where it was unanimously agreed that the case in court be withdrawn to pave way for a quick resolution of the matter.

It was however agreed at the meeting that two options would be explored in resolving the matter which are to

revalue the assets of the company to ascertain its present worth before its eventual privatisation, or to revalidate the sale of the company to Eba-Odan in 1994 by the Technical Committee on Privatisation and Commercialisation (TCPC) before it was reversed by the military government under the late General Sani Abacha.

For the second option, however, it would be mandatory for Eba-Odan, owned by Chief N.O Idowu, to refund the N78million paid to it by the federal government in 1998 with accrued interest, a condition which the governor and representatives of Eba-Odan led by Chief Lateef Fagbemi (SAN) seemed to be favourably disposed to.

Governor Ladoja had visited the BPE office with his commissioners and directors, asking the present manage-

ment of the bureau to correct the wrongs of the past by revalidating the sale of Leyland to Eba-Odan. He said the government's shares in Leyland were sold to Eba-Odan in 1994 by the company's receivership manager appointed by the government with N60million paid for the equity.

The governor alleged that the sale was reversed by TCPC on the instruction of the late Gen. Abacha.

The BPE Director, Automobile and Paper Mills, Mrs. Modupe Abiodun-Wright, however explained that records of the transaction available to the BPE showed that the N60million paid by Eba-Odan for Leyland was refunded by government when the transaction was upturned, together with N17million interest.

Initially, there was a disagreement over the whereabouts of the money as Mr. Yemi Idowu who repre-

sented Eba-Odan said his father's company refused to accept the refund.

He claimed that TCPC opened an account with FSB International Bank where the money was lodged. Having acquired the government's shares in Leyland, he said that Leyland had started production with the defunct Federal Mass Transit as its largest customer before agents of the Abacha government allegedly sent a task force to force the workers out of the place.



Mahindra scorpio is all-action SUV with a world class performance.

PAN to display 14 models at Kaduna fair

Peugeot Automobile Nigeria Limited (PAN) said it had concluded arrangements to participate in the 26th edition of the Kaduna International Trade Fair scheduled to commence from 18th to 27th February, 2005. Towards this end, 800

By Hamisu Muhammad,
Reporter (Business)

square metres have been acquired by the company to display its various models.

A statement signed by the PAN's Public Relation Manager, Baba Yahaya

Mohammed, said in addition to the display of its popular new generation models, the company would also showcase a 307 model painted in Valentine colour as a special offer to identify Peugeot lovers all over the world with the Valentine period.

Some of the new generation vehicles that will be on display include 306 XT, 306BL, 307 Sal and S/W, 406 Dynamic and 406 Prestige. Others are 607, 807, Partner and Expert. A total of 14 different models will be on display at this year's fair.

To support its customer service department, three leader distributors of PAN, ASD, Kaura and Madunka Motors, will be on hand to meet with potential customers that may wish to make price enquiries or on the spot purchase of vehicles.

PAN's participation in the fair, the statement said, is in support of this year's theme of "Private-Public Sector Partnership for Accelerated Growth and Development in Commerce, Industry and Agriculture."

Mercedes warns of difficult 2005 market

The head of DaimlerChrysler AG's troubled Mercedes division has warned that market conditions would worsen this year.

In an e-mail to employees obtained Friday by *The Associated Press*, Mercedes' Chief Executive Eckhard Cordes said that increasing competition in the premium car sector had resulted in "enormous price pressure."

"Because of higher raw material prices and worse foreign exchange assumptions, these difficult market conditions will further intensify and burden our business in the current year much more severely than previously," Cordes said.

On Thursday, DaimlerChrysler said its fourth-quarter net profit fell 63 per cent to 526 million euros (\$712 million) from 1.4 billion euros a year ago as Mercedes, once its star division, struggled with quality problems and the dollar's weakness against the euro, which hurt its results in the key U.S. market.

While once-troubled U.S. unit Chrysler more than doubled its fourth-quarter operating earnings to 386 million euros (\$523 million) from 143 million euros a year ago, earnings at Mercedes nearly evaporated — falling to just 20 million euros (\$27 million) from 784 million euros.

DaimlerChrysler CEO Juergen Schrempp called the Mercedes result "unacceptable" and announced a plan to cut costs and boost reve-

nues that he said would improve the division's profit margin to 7 per cent by 2007. It currently stands at 3.5 per cent.

Details were lacking, but the plan also was to include measures to fix problems at ultra-compact maker Smart, which is part of Mercedes. Smart has been losing money, though the company hasn't said how much.

"We have to do everything to achieve a competitive cost position as soon as possible," he said, and pledged to take "personal responsibility for bringing Mercedes' quality to the highest level again."



Peugeot 307SW one of the model to be display at Kaduna Trade Fair.

Today's flight schedule

Albarka Air

Lagos - Abuja	07:20
	10:30
	15:15
	13:00
Abuja - Lagos	8:45a.m.
	11:00
	13:15
	17:00

Maiduguri - Abuja	06:50
Abuja - Maid.	17:00
Abuja - PHC	9:00a.m.
PHC - Abuja	11:00a.m.
Lagos - Yola	1:00 p.m.
Abuja - Yola	14:30
Yola - Abuja	15:30
Yola - Lagos	4:00 p.m.

Chanchangi Airlines

Lagos - Abuja	8:15a.m.
	11:00a.m.
	12:10p.m.
	4:45p.m.
Kaduna - Lagos	8:30a.m.
P/H - Lagos	9:00a.m.
	4:30p.m.
Abuja - Kaduna	2:30p.m.
Kaduna - Abuja	1:30p.m.

IRS Airlines

CBQ - Abuja	8:00 a.m.
Abuja - Lagos	9:45a.m.
Lagos - Kaduna	9:30a.m.
Kano - Lagos	7:30p.m.
Lagos - Kano	11:15a.m.
Kaduna - Lagos	11:00a.m.
Lagos - Abu/MM	2:30p.m.
Abuja - MM	1:45p.m.
MM - Abuja	3:45p.m.
Abuja - CBQ	5:15p.m.
Kano - Abuja	1:15p.m.
Abuja - Kano	2:30p.m.
Kano - Lagos	3:45p.m.
Lagos - Kano	6:00p.m.

EAS Airlines

Lagos - Abuja	8:15p.m.
	11:45a.m.
	5:45p.m.
Abuja - Lagos	10:15a.m.
	7:15p.m.
Lagos - Jos	11:45a.m.
Jos - Lagos	2:30p.m.

Dasab Airlines

Auja-Lagos	8:30a.m.
Lagos-PHC	10:30a.m.
PHC-Lagos	12:30a.m.
Lagos-Kano	2:30p.m.
Kano-Lagos	4:30p.m.
Lagos-Abuja	6:30p.m.

ADC Airline

Lagos-Abuja	7:15a.m.
	12:45p.m.
Abuja-Lagos	8:55a.m.
Lagos-Calabar	11:15a.m.
Calabar-Lagos	7:20a.m.
P/H-Lagos	9:45a.m.
Lagos-Sokoto	8:55a.m.
Sokoto-Lagos	11:55a.m.

Most airlines operate the same flight schedule on week days.

Business Trust

ENERGY

BPE hands over "Abacha refinery" to core investor

The Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) has handed over West African Refinery Company Limited (WARCO) to Majestic Oil Exploration, Refinery and Marketing Company Limited Sierra Leone, the preferred bidder for the company popularly known as "Abacha refinery."

A statement signed by Sayo Akintola of communications, marketing and external relations, BPE said, the colourful hand-over ceremony took place at the weekend in Free-Town, the capital of Sierra Leone where (BPE) officials led by its director general, Dr. Julius Bala signed the necessary shares purchase agreement and handed-over papers with the Majestic Oil officials led by its executive chairman, Mr. Allieu Thorlu-Bangura.

The federal government's shareholding in WARCO arose as a result of the confiscation of shares held by Integrated Investment Trust Limited and Nasimatume Investments Limited, the two firms through which the late Gen Sani Abacha, and his National Security Adviser, Alhaji Samaila Gwarzo allegedly held controlling shares in the company.

Prior to its privatization by BPE, the shareholding composition of WARCO was federal government 48.44 percent; Oando Plc (formally Unipetrol Nig Plc) 24.22 per cent; Dome Company 6.06 percent, Ladcon Investments 3.21percent, and Cross Ocean Limited 18.09 percent.

The BPE boss, Dr. Julius Bala explained that the Bureau advertised for strategic investors for the federal government's equity in WARCO in February 2003, subsequent to approval of the National Council on Privatisation (NCP).

Simultaneously, he added that Oando Plc also indicated their desire to dispose of their shares and authorized the BPE to sell the shares along with federal government shares, thus permitting an offer of majority holding 72.66 percent to a prospective core investor.

These developments

necessitated a re-advertisement for expression of interest in 72.66percent equity in WARCO. In the process that ensued, Bala explained that majestic Oil, Sierra-Leone emerged as successful bidder.

"We are pleased to note that Majestic, an indigenous company whose desire to bid for WARCO was endorsed by the government of Sierra Leone through the minister of trade and industry, came through the BPE's usual strict and transparent bid process as the successful core investor in WARCO", Bala said.

He noted that despite the long period of neglect and extensive vandalisation of the refinery during the war, WARCO had continued to provide auxiliary services critical to oil marketing companies operating within Sierra Leone and other neighbouring West African States.

He added that the government of Sierra Leone, having identified the potential strategic nature of WARCO to the resuscitation of the Sierra

Leone economy made several appeals to the federal government to fast track the sale process to enable the new investor commence the rehabilitation of the refinery.

"While this process had been delayed due to legal proceedings instituted by a minority shareholder in WARCO, leading to a court injunction restraining the transfer of federal government's shares, we are happy to be here today to fulfill the desire of government and people of Sierra Leone, the court injunction having been vacated", Bala enthused.

The executive chairman of Majestic Oil, Mr. Allieu Thorlu-Bangura eulogized Nigerians for their intellect and business acumen. "Nigerians to me, have always been outstanding," he said. In a voice laden with grief, Thorlu-Bangura said.

Among the personalities present at the historic occasion are the BPE's Director (Oil & Gas) Alhaji Ibrahim Njiddah, Mr. Ayo Edu and Dr. Paul Idonigie, BPE transaction advisers, oil and gas and legal matters, respectively as well as Mr. Ibem Ayan, managing director, Oando Sierra Leone and Mr. Aloiyi Aigbonoga, Oando's legal officer.

FG begins privatisation of quarry companies

The federal government through the National Council on Privatisation (NCP) and the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) is inviting prospective strategic investors to express interest in the purchase and acquisition of the government's 100 percent shares in any of its quarry companies.

The quarry companies which are subsidiaries of the Nigerian Mining Corporation (NIMCO), Jos, include, Kujama Quarry Ltd, Kuru Quarry Ltd, Gano Quarry Ltd, Gubi Quarry Ltd and Suleija Quarry Ltd.

According to a statement from NCP

By Anas A. Galadima, Reporter (Business)

through the BPE, "interested applicants are expected to be local/international investors with a proven track record in ownership, financial capacity and technical competence in the management of quarry."

It would be recalled that the privatisation and commercialisation Act of 1999 slates the NIMCO quarry companies, which the federal government of Nigeria owns 100 per cent equity holding, for full privatisation.

The expressions of interests (EOIs) are expected to be submitted to the BPE not later than Monday, 28th February 2005.

MAN urges Kano govt to establish power plants

The Kano state branch of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), rose from its annual general meeting (AGM) with an urgent call on the state government to expedite action for the establishment of independent power plants.

The Kano Bompai branch chairman of MAN, Alhaji El-Tayeb Ibrahim who made the call in a speech delivered at the AGM, held at Royal Tropicana Hotel, Kano, said that the lingering electricity supply that bedevilled the state has ruined activities of manufacturing companies, the collapse of many of them.

Alhaji El-Tayeb said that government should promptly intervene into the problem through establishment of its independent electricity plants, warning that failure to

From Mustapha Isah Kwaru, Correspondent (Kano)

adopt such resolution will not augur well for the development of trade and commerce.



Magaji Mohammed, industry minister

In his words: "Two of the problems militating against the growth of trade and commerce, as well as agriculture and industry in Kano are insufficient water and electricity supply. The latter is the most worrisome one. We made our position clear on their predicaments and canvass for the establishment of independent power supply plants, which is the only way to do away with the problem."

The MAN chairman expressed optimism over the proposed reform bill on power generation, which is about to be passed into law by the National Assembly, in which independent power operators will be allowed to sell directly to the consumers.

He reiterated the call on the state government to stamp its legacy by calling investors to install private power plants, especially for industries located at Sharada and Challawa areas.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

LAUNCHING OF N20 BILLION EC SUPPORT TO THE NIGERIAN CENSUS PROJECT

This year, Nigeria will have its first census for almost fifteen years. An accurate and credible census is critical to the ongoing NEEDS reform programme, as it forms the basis for efficient and fair use of Government funds.

Given the importance of this task, the European Commission (EC) is providing £113.5 Million (20 billion Naira) to assist the Nigerian authorities - over half the total cost of the census.

The EC funding is a grant, not a loan, implemented largely through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFP A).

The purpose of the EC support is not only to ensure that the forthcoming census exercise is accurate, but also that it is seen to be accurate by the Nigerian people. The project will finance: (i) over 800,000 census enumerators; (ii) printing of questionnaires, (iii) independent monitoring of all stages of the census and (iv) awareness activities to stimulate informed debate around the census.

There is already a lively public debate on the census, which is clearly welcome. Much of this has concentrated on the question of whether or not questions about religion and ethnicity should be asked. These are clearly questions for Nigerians, on which the European Commission does not and should not have any position. However, the census is a viable and necessary exercise whether or not these questions are included. With detailed and accurate population figures, it becomes possible to make informed decisions about where to locate health centres, schools, roads, power supplies, to name but a few of the ingredients needed to promote development and reduce poverty. These are needed where people actually live, not in their 'places of origin'. It is therefore vital for citizens to inform themselves about the census, and to take part where they normally live.

Business Trust

1ST-TIER SECURITIES

THE NIGERIAN STOCK EXCHANGE

REPORT AS AT MONDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2005

NAME	LClose	Open	High	Low	Close	Change	Trades	Volume	Value
CUTIXI	.36	1.36	1.36	1.36	1.36	0.00	1	1,000	1,360.00
Sector Totals							1	1,000	1,360.00
AGRICULTURE/AGRO-ALLIED									
OKITIPUPA	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.00	1	4,000	3,120.00
OKOMUOIL	16.00	16.00	16.80	16.00	16.80	0.80	5	81,000	1,340,500.00
PRESCO	11.98	11.39	12.00	11.39	11.68	-0.30	10	65,500	768,130.00
Sector Totals							16	150,500	2,111,750.00
AUTOMOBILE & TYRE									
DUNLOP	2.10	2.10	2.12	2.00	2.00	-0.10	27	475,066	979,204.94
RTBRISCOE	7.22	7.22	7.22	6.86	6.86	-0.36	19	31,083	217,263.96
Sector Totals							46	506,149	1,196,468.90
BANKING									
ACCESSBANK	3.42	3.42	3.42	3.42	3.42	0.00	16	164,608	562,959.36
AFRIBANK	6.63	6.63	6.63	6.63	6.63	0.00	10	30,280	200,756.40
CHARTERED	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.90	0.00	2	7,300	28,470.00
COOPBANK	1.92	1.92	1.92	1.92	1.92	0.00	2	28,000	53,760.00
FIRSTBANK	23.00	23.00	23.99	22.85	22.98	-0.02	485	2,878,818	66,950,855.71
FSB	1.47	1.43	1.45	1.43	1.45	-0.02	18	200,702	287,651.65
GUARANTY	11.28	11.28	11.30	11.15	11.27	-0.01	204	1,241,634	13,982,792.29
GULFBANK	0.81	0.77	0.77	0.77	0.77	-0.04	3	140,000	107,800.00
IMB	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.57	0.57	-0.03	37	7,548,991	4,307,854.87
INTERCONT	7.81	7.81	7.81	7.81	7.81	0.00	2	3,000	23,430.00
LIONBANK	0.67	0.64	0.67	0.64	0.67	0.00	4	93,375	62,501.25
MANNYBANK	1.12	1.12	1.12	1.10	1.10	-0.02	8	302,665	333,984.80
NAL	2.80	2.80	2.80	2.80	2.80	0.00	6	81,207	227,379.60
OCEANIC	5.75	5.47	5.47	5.47	5.47	-0.28	3	3,440	18,816.80
OWENABANK	1.62	1.70	1.70	1.69	1.70	0.08	25	1,036,809	1,760,355.30
STB	7.41	7.41	7.41	7.41	7.41	0.00	9	1,022,900	7,579,689.00
TRADEBANK	1.35	1.35	1.35	1.35	1.35	0.00	4	3,175	4,286.25
UBA	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	0.00	56	1,269,130	12,691,300.00
UBN	20.00	20.01	20.10	19.80	20.00	0.00	363	2,618,620	52,156,965.28
UTB	0.81	0.77	0.77	0.77	0.77	-0.04	12	606,250	466,812.50
WEMABANK	3.93	3.93	3.93	3.93	3.93	0.00	12	57,481	225,900.33
ZENITHBANK	13.54	13.01	13.65	13.00	13.65	0.11	207	2,603,765	34,634,475.35
Sector Totals							1,488	21,942,150	196,668,796.74
BREWERIES									
GUINNESS	100.00	100.00	100.00	99.96	100.00	0.00	133	305,011	30,499,266.70
JOSBREW	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.80	0.00	2	1,700	6,460.00
NB	40.85	40.64	40.65	38.81	38.81	-2.04	518	2,053,045	81,459,487.28
Sector Totals							653	2,359,756	111,965,213.98
BUILDING MATERIALS									
ASHAKACEM	23.21	23.21	24.00	23.21	24.00	0.79	58	869,634	20,560,003.97
BCC	4.07	4.00	4.00	3.90	4.00	-0.07	6	262,842	1,048,583.80
CCNN	7.44	7.25	7.80	7.24	7.80	0.36	13	165,472	1,250,794.31
WAPCO	11.03	11.10	11.57	11.10	11.12	0.09	22	55,611	625,145.84
Sector Totals							99	1,353,559	23,484,527.92
CHEMICAL & PAINTS									
BERGER	4.70	4.70	4.93	4.70	4.79	0.09	17	94,826	451,905.20
CAP	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.65	7.00	0.00	8	11,168	76,370.70
IPWA	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.00	4	6,250	3,125.00
NIG-GERMAN	4.37	4.37	4.45	4.37	4.45	0.08	7	49,911	220,341.07
Sector Totals							36	162,155	751,741.97
COMPUTER & OFFICE EQUIPMENT									
NCR	1.30	1.30	1.30	1.30	1.30	0.00	1	166	215.80
TRIPPLEG	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.00	3	5,737	4,991.19
Sector Totals							4	5,903	5,206.99
CONGLOMERATES									
AGLEVENT	1.05	1.05	1.10	1.05	1.10	0.05	10	210,900	224,882.85
CFAO	4.52	4.60	4.60	4.59	4.60	0.08	8	718,209	3,303,741.40
CHELLARAM	1.71	1.71	1.71	1.71	1.71	0.00	1	1,620	2,770.20
JOHNHOLT	0.81	0.78	0.81	0.77	0.81	0.00	6	38,040	29,736.00
LEVROS	16.55	16.55	16.55	16.01	16.24	-0.31	169	672,157	10,878,563.17
PZ	13.91	13.91	14.50	13.50	14.00	0.09	87	530,437	7,419,144.63
UACN	14.17	14.17	14.17	14.17	14.17	0.00	38	201,591	2,856,544.47
UTC	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15	0.00	7	94,525	108,703.75
Sector Totals							326	2,467,479	24,824,086.47
CONSTRUCTION									
JBERGER	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	0.00	5	30,000	420,000.00
Sector Totals							5	30,000	420,000.00
ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY									
NIWICABLE	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.00	1	600	552.00
Sector Totals							1	600	552.00
FOOD/BEVERAGES & TOBACCO									
7UP	25.40	25.40	26.00	24.65	26.00	0.60	29	86,425	2,188,603.25
CADBURY	56.40	56.40	58.00	54.01	58.00	1.60	146	569,284	32,101,586.41
FLOURMILL	16.61	16.61	16.61	16.61	16.61	0.00	18	44,444	738,214.84
NBC	53.50	53.52	54.00	53.52	53.60	0.10	55	147,805	7,945,445.75
NESTLE	148.00	148.00	150.00	146.05	148.00	0.00	71	119,565	17,723,430.59
Sector Totals							319	967,523	60,697,280.84
HEALTHCARE									
EKOCORP	0.76	0.73	0.73	0.73	0.73	-0.03	7	115,000	83,950.00
EVANSMED	3.36	3.40	3.40	3.36	3.36	0.00	5	16,000	54,120.00
MAY&BAKER	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.30	0.00	6	11,550	61,215.00
MORISON	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	0.00	3	10,000	10,800.00
PFIZER	3.48	3.48	3.48	3.31	3.35	-0.13	16	162,770	541,718.70
PHARMDEKO	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	0.00	5	37,043	166,693.50
SKBEECHAM	8.90	8.46	8.90	8.46	8.46	-0.44	23	293,272	2,484,161.12
Sector Totals							65	645,635	3,402,658.32
INDUSTRIAL/DOMESTIC PRODUCTS									
ALEX	2.66	2.66	2.66	2.66	2.66	0.00	1	1,541	4,099.06
FIRSTALUM	1.02	1.00	1.00	0.99	0.99	-0.03	4	39,000	38,960.00
IGL	2.88	2.99	3.00	2.99	3.00	0.12	7	139,025	416,857.50
VITAFOAM	3.36	3.36	3.36	3.36	3.36	0.00	30	269,523	905,597.28
VONO	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90	0.00	2	680	1,292.00
Sector Totals							44	449,769	1,366,805.84
INSURANCE									
AJICO	2.15	2.05	2.15	2.05	2.05	-0.10	5	9,237	19,035.85
CORNERST	1.57	1.50	1.63	1.50	1.63	0.06	5	3,022,643	4,922,198.06
CRUSADER	1.22	1.20	1.20	1.16	1.16	-0.06	5	134,194	158,152.80
LINKASSURE	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.64	1.64	-0.08	3	18,000	29,760.00
NEM	0.86	0.86	0.86	0.86	0.86	0.00	1	100,000	86,000.00
PRESTIGE	1.97	1.97	1.97	1.97	1.97	0.00	1	34	66.98
UNIC	1.17	1.17	1.22	1.17	1.22	0.05	14	249,400	300,271.00
WAPIC	2.50	2.50	2.62	2.50	2.52	0.02	5	33,400	87,340.44
Sector Totals							39	3,566,908	5,602,825.13
PACKAGING									
AVONCROWN	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.15	0.00	1	200	230.00
CMB	1.52	1.52	1.52	1.52	1.52	0.00	2	10,300	15,656.00
DELTGLAS	4.50	4.28	4.28	4.28	4.28	-0.22	1	10,000	42,800.00
Sector Totals							4	20,500	58,686.00
PETROLEUM(MARKETING)									
AFROIL	0.89	0.92	0.92	0.86	0.86	-0.03	5	172,338	154,290.68
AP	62.80	62.85	65.00	62.85	65.00	2.20	72	91,388	5,811,085.27
ETERNAOIL	2.04	2.04	2.04	2.04	2.04	0.00	24	1,722,844	3,514,601.76
MOBIL	183								

LABOUR & EMPLOYMENT

NARTO blames high transport

cost on interest rates

The National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO), has attributed the high cost of road transportation in Nigeria to high interest rates charged by banks and absence of government regulation of the transport-sector.

The national operations coordinator of NARTO, Alhaji Lawal Isa who stated this while speaking with newsmen in Abuja yesterday said while the high interest rate was strangulating business in the transport sector, the absence of regulation has made the sector porous and dominated by all comers, most of whom he said were not suitable for the business.

"If you have one or two vehicles, you need to re-invest to make them grow to become a big fleet, given the speciality of transport of business, you need to have regular cash-flow but Nigerian banks are not ready to guarantee this because they consider road transportation as a high risk business, so you wait for your vehicles to bring the working capital to

By Austine Odo, Senior Labour Reporter

continue business and that is an anathema for expansion when you fall back on banks, where they are ready, interest rates are prohibitive, at the end of the day you discover that you will be working for them and not your self that is why government has to intervene on the interest rate issue," he said.

Alhaji Lawal Isa also played the encroachment of the nation's transport sector by foreigners and those whose businesses irrelevant to transportation, saying this situation has caused confusion in the system whereby "anybody can be a transporters. "Road transport is not regulated, it is supposed to be regulated, and that is why there is total confusion, and in a confused situation like this, you cannot be sure

of quality service but today those who have the capacity are those who are crying," he said.

He pointed out that the absence of regulation has resulted in the lack of a level playing field whereby expatriate companies with stronger capital base had come to take over the long haulage business.

"With this situation, a foreigner will have upper hand, because all the capital he needs is 10,000 dollars while you need N20 million, so there is no level playing field or favourable climate, and it is very painful," he said.



On the job: Photojournalists capture an interesting moment at a public function in Abuja...recently

NLC urges unions to forge common front

The Sokoto State chairman of the NLC, Alhaji Garba Liman, has urged labour unions to forge a common front on all issues.

"They need to be united, streamline and coordinate their activities effectively," he said.

Liman gave the advice in Sokoto at the quadrennial state delegates conference of the Sokoto State chapter of the Amalgamated Union of Public Corporations, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE).

"Unless the unions do this and become stronger and formidable, they may continue to be weak and vulnerable to sinister motives to break them," Liman added.

The Sokoto NLC Chairman commended the Sokoto State government for its continuous support to and cooperation with the NLC.

The AUPCTRE Chairman, Alhaji Haliru Tambuwal, said the union was not opposed to the contributory pension scheme but "the security and safety of funds is required".

"The federal government should take custody of the funds through the CBN when it comes to implementation stage," Tambuwal said.

Benue NUT initiates loan scheme for primary school teachers

The Benue State chapter of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) has instituted a loan scheme to mitigate the sufferings of primary school teachers in the state.

The chairman of the chapter, Mr Isaac Achem, told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) at the weekend in Makurdi that teachers could obtain loan facilities from the scheme which the government was unable to provide for them.

Under the scheme, he said, teachers were expected to contribute N100 every month, and on retirement, receive their full contribution with 30 per cent interest.

Achem said 2,900

motorcycles had so far been distributed to teachers under the loan scheme which started in 2002.

He said that 15,000 motorcycles would be distributed under scheme, adding that the measure was to solve the transportation needs of teachers.

He disclosed that the state government had undertaken to settle the monthly pensions of primary school teachers

who retired more than two years ago.

Achem said that the exercise which began in November last year, does not include payment of gratuity.

He said although it was the responsibility of the federal government to pay primary school teachers' pensions and gratuity, the state government had to intervene to alleviate the sufferings of the teachers.



Gov George Akume of Benue

Akwa Ibom civil servants reap benefits of monetisation

Akwa Ibom State civil servants started to reap the benefits of the state's monetisation policy in January, the finance commissioner, Mr Umana Okon Umana has said.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) quotes Umana as saying that commissioners and permanent secretaries in the state "are no longer entitled to official cars in accordance with the monetisation policy".

"Commissioners and permanent secretaries are given car loans to buy and maintain the vehicles of their

choices, but fall back on the central pool during special assignments," he explained.

On the on-going road maintenance in the state, Umana noted that 55 per cent of the contract cost had been released, but did not disclose the total cost of contracts.

On internally generated revenue, the finance commissioner said the state had "recorded some improvement".

"Our revenue will double when Exxon-Mobil pays to the state, its fair share of taxes for oil exploration activities," Umana noted.

International Labour

French workers to put in 48 hrs a week

French lawmakers have voted in favour of a controversial bill to increase the country's 35-hour working week. The proposal backed by a large majority allows private-sector employees to work up to 48 hours a week.

The vote followed weeks of protests from trade unions fearing the move may empower companies instead of unions to dictate working hours.

President Chirac's government hopes the Senate will approve the bill next month, after which it would become law.

Observers say the 370-180 vote underscores the government's determination to revamp a system that it blames for a stubbornly high unemployment rate and rising labour costs.

French unemployment figures stand at about 10% of the work force amid complaints from private sector companies that the existing system makes them uncompetitive.

Other than allowing people to work for up to 48 hours in a week - the EU approved maximum - the proposal also relaxes the overtime limit from 180 hours per year to 220.

Workers' groups, however, are threatening further demonstrations over the plans, arguing that the proposal was the first step towards undermining a social security system consolidated by President Jacques Chirac's socialist predecessor.

Trade unions are taking heart from a recent poll suggesting 69% of people were against longer working hours, correspondents say.

More than 300,000 people marched in protests at the weekend, according to an interior ministry count.

However, the unions' power to call strikes in the event of the plans going ahead is limited, believes Dominique Barbet, chief economist at bank BNP Paribas.

"Only 8% of French workers are members of a trade union. Even if they look strong, they are not strong," he told BBC World TV.

"This will mean the end of the shortened working time. "It means management will decide the working time, not the employees."

Socialist MPs managed to force the vote to be delayed by a day on Tuesday.

But Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin says the government will not be deterred.

The BBC's Caroline Wyatt in Paris says Mr Raffarin's current slogan of "work more to earn more", seems to have become the battle cry in a bitter ideological fight between those who want to protect the French social model and the reformers.

Association faults Africa's performance at international market

The executive secretary, African Iron and Steel Association (AISA), Dr Mohammed Sanusi, has said that Africa's performance at the international steel market is not a true representation of the continent's potential.

Sanusi told the newsmen at the weekend in Abuja that the continent's dwindling performance at the international arena was due to inconsistent policies and insecurity of lives and investment.

He said that the high spate of policy inconsistency as well as instability on the part of African governments had deprived the continent the opportunity to showcase to the world its potential.

"Policy inconsistency and insecurity has also affected and scared away genuine investors from investing on the continent," he added.

He regretted the although the time was ripe for Africa to enjoy a bigger share of the world steel market, governments of the various countries were not making efforts to tap into the available opportunities.

"Several enquires from Asia and Europe are received all the time on the abundant and untapped steel products and raw materials available on the continent but fear of inconsistent policy would not allow genuine investors to come and invest," he said.

He said that inconsistency which manifested in the areas of continuity, delivery, price regime had made it impossible for international bodies to enter into business with Africans.

On Nigeria, the secretary said that as the giant of Africa, the country had not done a lot to improve the situation as inconsistent policies, dishonesty, insecurity, corruption and heavy bureaucratic interference abound in the country.

He urged African leaders to revisit their privatisation policy especially as it concerned the steel sector, stressing that ongoing events showed that the privatisation was not carried out in good faith.

"The policy as implemented in most African countries is not laid on solid foundation which is the main reason why it failed to attract genuine investors," he said.

He called on African leaders to display enough political will, transparency, honesty as well as provide necessary incentives that would enable the continent fulfill its quota at the international steel market.

LABOUR & EMPLOYMENT

Applicants flay difficulty in accessing NDE loans

Loan applicants for mass employment programmes of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) are complaining of difficulty in accessing NDE loans, *Labour Trust* findings have revealed.

The NDE was established to design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment in Nigeria. It has since the inception of its programmes in 1987, evolved various strategies to reduce unemployment in the country. The strategies include provision of vocational skills acquisition training to school leavers, provision of entrepreneurial training to graduates of tertiary institutions, training for rural employment, training for labour-based work programmes and resettlement of trained beneficiaries.

Under these strategies, the directorate as at September 2004, trained 749,997 unemployed youths, while 700,000 graduates of tertiary institutions have undergone entrepreneurship development training under the NYSC.

A total of 790,788 trained beneficiaries have been assisted to establish micro-enterprises in various part of the federation.

But a cross section of youths who were expected to benefit from some of the NDE programmes have expressed serious concern on the difficulties being encountered in the process of acquiring the loans.

Abigail Patrick, NDE No 136178, a HND business administration graduate told *Labour Trust* that she registered at the NDE office in zone 6 and attended the orientation course for several weeks and the entrepreneurial skills acquisition training for one month.

Abigail wanted to start catering business. She said she was directed to the Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank to open an account with no less than N200,000 since she wanted a loan of N500,000. Others though were to deposit between 10 to 20 percent of the total amount needed as loan.

She was eager and proceeded with her feasibility studies and eventual proposal which she went to present. On the day she was to submit it a senior official allegedly told her she would need a letter from the presidency.

Sara kayit, a HND B.Admin graduate wanted a loan of N250,000 to open a salon. Like others she was asked to first open an account with a designated bank. The account must have N150,000 in it.

Even then, she was bluntly told to expect the N250,000 in a year's time. She was to pay 10 per cent on the eventual amount within six

By Abdullahi M. Gulloma,
Labour Reporter

months to 1 year of securing the loan.

Sara was told by an NDE official to get a letter of introduction from a senator from her senatorial district or from the office of the governor Nassarawa State from where she hails. A senior official told her not to waste her effort, time and resources as not a dime will be granted anybody except those with letters from the presidency. Her NDE No was 136178.

Helen Ify BSc, Zoology with NDE Rc 65382 presented her proposal for N500,000 to open a small scale company for ice block within her environment but like others unless she could get a note from the office of the vice president there would be no deal. She even indicated she had N250,000 of her own as ownership start off capital.

Yahaya Sunday wanted a loan to open car wash business.

He submitted to the rigours of the training exercise and said he needed N400,000 and was ready to provide N50,000 as start off capital. But at the designated bank he was asked to open an account with N150,000 before he could expect anything.

Gabriel Mgabi, an NCE graduate, wanted loan to begin farming for lettuce leaves and pumpkin. He needed N200,000 but was asked to provide N100,000

ownership start off capital. He had nothing. As an alternative he was asked to provide a letter from the presidency, which he could not.

An NDE senior officer at the Zone 6 office encouraged him to look elsewhere for funds.

But he regretted that the NDE loan was not reliable, not forthcoming and that it was largely a deceit. The officials said that only 7 persons were granted loans out of the 1000 supposedly approved proposals in the last three years.

The official advised him to get a letter from the presidency if he insisted on being granted an NDE loan. "The loans here are for a selected few who must be highly connected. Don't allow anybody to deceive you that you can walk in here and get loan no matter the efficacy of your proposal," he was told.

But Wisdom Okoro secondary school leaver was fortunate, she was sent for computer literacy. But six months later she was asked to pay N7,500 to get her certificate. She was able to buy 16 of her colleagues could not and till date have not been given.

Efforts by our labour reporter to get the views of the director general, Eng. Samuel Adedun on the issue failed as several trips to his office could not produce results while his phone remained switched-off, making it impossible to reach him.

Labour leaders disagree over confab

From Samson Ojo,
Correspondent (Lagos)

Some labour leaders have withdrawn their support for the president of Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Comrade Adams Oshiomhole over his position in the proposed national dialogue scheduled to commence today.

A cross section of labour leaders who spoke to *Labour Trust* expressed dismay that the NLC president announced labour's participation at the proposed conference without meeting with other labour leaders, to deliberate and come out with a common position.

An assistant secretary general in the NLC complained that participating at the confab would amount to mortgaging labour's role, and that it will be a betrayal of the civil society groups that have always fought to resist the federal government's oppressive economic policies.

Addressing a press conference, the general secretary of the National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE), Comrade Precious Kiri Kalio, dissociated the union from the endorsement by the NLC of the national dialogue.

He faulted NLC's decision to participate in the proposed political reform conference, saying due consultations

were not made by the central labour body.

On his part, Comrade Ntukube Nbenig of NUEE told *Labour Trust*, that the leadership of congress had derailed.

Justifying his position, comrade Nbenig described the NLC leaders as too autocratic in character as according to him, labour has



Governor Obong Victor Attah of Akwa Ibom State (2nd right) inspects equipment to support graduates of a pilot skill development programme organised by the state life enhancement agency in Uyo...recently

Union accuses Arewa Textiles mgt of violating laws

The National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria (NUTGTWN), has called on the federal, state government, community and religious leaders to prevail on the management of Arewa Textile Mills to respect labour standards and the country's labour laws.

A statement signed by the president of the union, Comrade Reginald Agulanna and the acting general secretary, Comrade Issa Aremu said the call was necessary in order to save the company from what the union referred to as "total collapse."

According to the union, the management of Arewa Textiles Plc unilaterally closed down the company on

January 5, 2005 without adherence to labour laws and laid down procedures.

"Before the closure, workers salaries and other entitlements were not being paid as at when due. Union dues and other levies running into several millions which management deducted from workers' salaries, were not remitted," the union said.

The NUTGTWN also alleged that the management of the company unilaterally terminated the appointments

of about 342 workers while 481 workers were summarily dismissed for protesting the non-payment of backlog of salaries owed them by the company.

"The unilateral termination and summary dismissal of these workers' appointments by the then newly employed general manager, Dr. Ejila Oybi, was to enable management carry out restructuring to reposition the company. The union condemns and frowns at this action of management and subsequently resolved to send a protest letter and called for another round of meeting," the union said.

Delta youths organise employment summit

The employment, labour and productivity unit of Supreme Niger Delta Youth Council Worldwide (SNDYCW) is organising a three-day employment summit in order to address restiveness among youths of Niger Delta.

President of SNDYCW, Comrade Michael N.E. Ekamon who disclosed this to newsmen in Abuja, said that the employment summit would commence between 24th and 26th of February 2005 in Calabar, Cross River State.

He said that, the world has seen the people of Niger Delta as being restive, and the SNDYCW is determined to change that perception by engaging the youth in something that will make them productive.

"We discovered that our people are so militant. And after consultations with our elders, we arrived at a decision that we constitute what we call annual employment summits that will bring together the youth of the Niger Delta so that they can be busy for once."

Pension: Union threatens to shut 37 companies

Workers in the food industry under the aegis of Food, Beverages and Tobacco Senior Staff Association (FOBTOS) have concluded arrangements to close down indefinitely, thirty seven (37) companies in the country for their inability to pay workers' pensions and gratuities.

Disclosing this in an interview with *Labour Trust*, executive secretary of FOBTOS, Mr. Adeola Joseph, explained that the union has mobilized all its members to commence massive picketing of the companies with effect from February 21, 2005.

According to him, all the affiliates of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN) have been called upon to join the union in compelling the companies to obey labour laws. The FOBTOS scribe said that

the union decided to embark on the picketing exercise against the 37 companies because it has made several entreaties to the management of the companies but they have refused to pay their workers' pensions and gratuities.

Said he; "In a letter dated February 1, 2005, copied to all chief executives of the affected companies failure to effect the payment of our members entitlements will force workers to down tools."

The 37 affected companies according to Mr. Joseph include: Standard Biscuits and Agro products limited, Jos. Plateau State; Savannah Sugar Company Limited, Yola, Adamawa State; Northern Nigeria Flour Mills PLC, Kano State; Nigeria Sugar Company Plc, Bacita, Kwara State; Benue Breweries Limited, Markudi Benue State.

Industrial Company Ikeja, Lagos State; Consolidated Breweries Plc, Iddo, Lagos State; DIL/MALTOX Nigeria Limited, Agbara, Ogun State; Jemstar & Company Limited Isolo, Lagos State; Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc, Apapa, Lagos state; International Beer and Beverages Industry Limited Kaduna, Kaduna State; ideal Flour Mills Limited Kaduna, Kaduna State; International and Margarine Products Limited, Ikeja, Lagos State; International Distillers limited Sango Otta, Ogun State; International Tobacco Company Limited, Ilorin, Kwara State; International Breweries Plc, Ilesa, Osun State; Jos International Breweries, Plc Jos., Plateau State, Life Breweries Ltd, Onitsha, Anambra State; Limca Bottlers Limited Okigwe, Imo state.

Mills Limited,, Maiduguri Borno State, Nestle Nigeria Plc, Agbara, Ogun State; Nigeria Eagle Flour Mills Limited Ibadan, Oyo State; Niger Biscuits Company Limited Apapa, Lagos State, Niger Delta Flour Mills, Umunya Anambra State, Niger Mills Company Limited, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria Bottling Company Plc Oyingbo Lagos State, UTC Nigeria Plc Apapa, Lagos state, Nigeria Distillers Limited, Sango Otta Ogun State, PAL Breweries Limited, Oko Aguata Anambra State, Port Harcourt Flour Mills, Limited, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Seven Up Bottling Company Plc Ijora, Lagos state, Stenmark Cocoa Products Limited, Ono state, Vita Malt Plc Agbara Ogun State, Warri Bottling Co. Ltd, Warri Delta State and Camco Foods Nigeria Limited, Lagos State.



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7.	25cm x 3	10 x 3	45,000	51,000	-	66,000
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10.	22.6cm x 4	9 x 4	54,000	62,000	-	80,000
11.	22.6cm x 3	9 x 3	41,000	46,000	-	60,000
12.	20cm x 6	8 x 6	72,000	82,000	94,000	106,000
13.	26cm x 5	8 x 5	60,000	68,000	78,000	88,000
14.	20cm x 4	8 x 4	48,000	55,000	-	71,000
15.	20cm x 3	8 x 3	36,000	41,000	-	53,000
16.	17cm x 5	7 x 6	63,000	78,000	-	93,000
17.	17cm x 5	7 x 5	52,000	60,000	-	77,000
18.	17cm x 4	7 x 4	42,000	48,000	-	62,000
19.	17cm x 3	7 x 3	32,000	36,000	-	47,000
20.	15cm x 3	6 x 5	45,000	51,000	-	66,000
21.	15cm x 3	6 x 3	27,000	31,000	-	40,000
22.	15cm x 2	6 x 2	18,000	20,000	-	27,000
23.	13cm x 2	5 x 2	15,000	17,000	-	22,000
24.	10cm x 2	4 x 2	12,000	14,000	-	18,000
25.	7.5cm x 2	3 x 2	9,000	11,000	-	14,000
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THE PRESIDENCY

IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE OF THE WHITE PAPER ON THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE ALIENATION OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LANDED PROPERTY

RELOCATION ARRANGEMENTS FOR OCCUPANTS OF DISPOSED FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HIGH-RISE HOUSES IN LAGOS

The implementation Committee of the White Paper on the Commission of Inquiry into the Alienation of Federal Government Landed Property is in the final stages of taking physical possession of the following disposed high-rise Federal Government buildings in Lagos for hand-over to the purchasers:

- a). 1004 Estate, Victoria Island
- b). Eric Moore Tower, Surulere
- c). Mulliner Towers, Ikoyi
- d). Awolowo Road Towers, Ikoyi
- e). Alagbon Towers (Ikoyi Towers)

Regarding these high-rise buildings, Government directed that they should not be sold flat by flat to the present occupants, but should be sold en bloc to the highest bidder for the following reasons:

- i). These high-rise towers consist of complex integrated services such as water works, sewage system, vertical transportation, maintenance unit, etc, and it was felt that priority should be given to prospective buyers with the financial capability to maintain these integrated services to avoid turning the estates into unsightly slums in the city centre but retain their aesthetics.
- ii). The Committee felt that alienating these properties flat by flat to the present occupants would unjustly exclude other Nigerians who have a stake in this matter, and a right to participate in an open competitive process.
- iii). The Committee is aware that a good number of the present occupants of these properties are not public servants but illegal occupants who have "rented" their flats from initial allottees. Another fraction of these occupants are public servants who are enjoying double allocation by holding on to their flats in Lagos in addition to their official quarters in Abuja or elsewhere. Some are retirees who have refused to vacate their flats in the hope of eventually purchasing them. It is only a few of the present occupants that are legally entitled to be there. In this circumstance, the Committee considered it unwise to dispose the flats to whoever the occupants were.

It should be emphasised that it is only in the high rise housing estates that the legal sitting tenants will not

enjoy any special consideration for the reasons adduced above. Sitting tenants in other single unit occupied buildings would be given the opportunity to purchase their houses (bungalows and duplexes) in the next phase of the sale.

In order to ease the housing problems of the displaced occupants of the disposed high rise buildings in Lagos, the Implementation Committee approached the Federal Housing Authority and CITEC Nigeria Limited which made available a reasonable number of three and four bedroom flats, detached and semi-detached bungalows and duplexes in Lagos and Abuja for sale to the present legal occupants of the affected properties. (See photographs). The Committee has also contacted the FMBN to provide mortgage to facilitate these transactions. The Committee has also made alternative arrangements to relocate the 155 military personnel occupying the affected properties. All the affected occupants should therefore remain calm and await further information, please.

The implementation Committee wishes to emphasise that the sale of selected Federal Government Landed properties in Lagos is not part of the monetisation policy of the Federal Government. The activities of the Committee commenced in August 2001, long before the coming into effect of the monetisation policy. The primary reason for the sale of the affected Federal Government properties in Lagos was because they became excess and unrequired as a result of the movement of the seat of Government to Abuja in 1991. It is therefore incorrect to assert as some have done that the sale of these properties is pursuant to the monetisation policy or a special scheme to assist civil servants.

In spite of this, the Committee always endeavours to take due cognisance of the special needs of all public servants.

Signed
Prof. P. T. Ahire
 Committee Secretary



4 - Bedroom Duplex of Mborra District, Abuja.



3 - Bedroom Bungalows at Mboru District, Abuja.



Duplexes and Bungalows at Mboru District, Abuja.



Block of 3 - Bedrooms at Gwarimpa, Abuja.



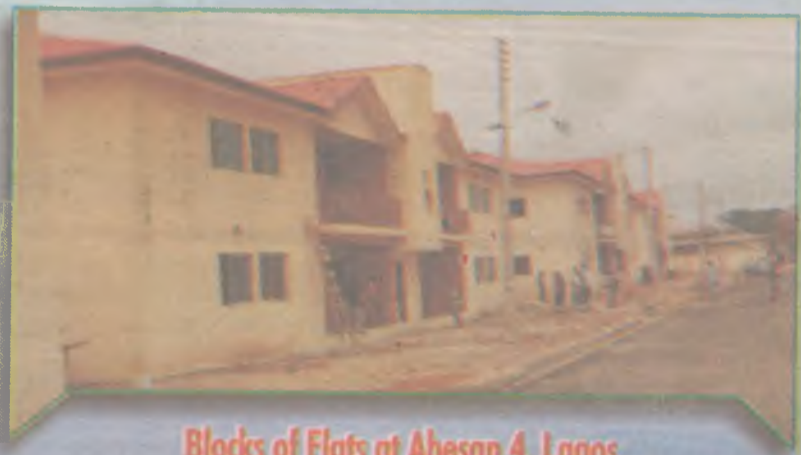
Block of 3 - Bedroom Flat at Gwarimpa District, Abuja.



Block of 3 - Bedrooms, Gwarimpa, Abuja.



Block of 3 - Bedrooms Gwarimpa, Abuja.



Blocks of Flats at Abesan 4, Lagos.



Blocks of Flats at Abesan 4, Lagos.



Semi - Detached 4 - Bedroom Duplexes at Satellite Town, Lagos.



Semi - Detached 4 - Bedroom Duplexes at Abesan 4, Lagos.

YOUR HEALTH

Health interactive

With Dr Aminu Magashi

Anti-retroviral therapy in Nigeria

What started as a mild form of Anti-RetroViral Therapy by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) is assuming a gigantic momentum if the information emanating from the United States, Embassy and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is any thing to go by. Keen followers of events related to provision of anti-retroviral (HIV) drugs to People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Nigeria would remember that two years or thereabout ago, the FGN introduced the supply and provision of anti-retroviral drugs to teaching hospitals and federal medical centres across the nation, and the PLWHA were short listed for collecting drugs on monthly basis with only one thousand naira committed to cover the cost of monitoring the progress of responding to treatment. When the FGN started, the number of PLWHA enjoying such services was about 15,000 (10 thousand adults and 5 thousand children). I argued severally on these pages that the only obvious shortcoming of such programme is the number of PLWHA being covered. 15 thousand PLWHA in a country of about 4 million people living and infected with HIV/AIDS, although it is not all infected individuals that need to go on drugs, but nevertheless, the coverage is very meager. I recommended that for Nigeria's HIV prevalence to reduce appreciably and to achieve decrease in the spread of HIV/AIDS, there is the need for the FGN to increase the number of people receiving such drugs, and more importantly, states and LGAs must be involved in the supply and distribution of such drugs.

In 2004, another intervention began to provide anti-retroviral drugs, although to very few selected areas. The four year intervention will reach out to only 8000 PLWHA; 2000 people to be enrolled every year only cover Ibadan, Lagos, Jos and Maidugiri. When one add the FGN and APIN Project in 2004, only 17 thousand people were assumed to be on the list of receiving the subsidised drugs.

In my article *Abstinence and \$ 15 Billion USA Initiative* published on this page on 30th July, 2003, I mentioned that Mr. Bush administration had earmarked \$15 billion to address HIV/AIDS saga in Africa through *Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)* and one third of such grant would be spent in promoting abstinence and the remaining two-third on provision of anti-retroviral drugs. Then, there were a lot of criticisms from many international organisations that focus mainly on condom use as a means of preventing HIV/AIDS. The one that was outstanding on such criticisms is the International Planned Parenthood Federation (America Branch). They reportedly accused the right wing and hard liners in the Bush administration of sidelining and sabotaging condom promoters which in their naive opinion would add to the spread of HIV; not halting the saga.

In that article, I carpeted such criticisms as a barking of a toothless bull dog. Even though I don't really know the rationale behind the Bush administration's decision of not prioritising the use condom, I still supported such policy of putting Condom use to the background. For Africa to achieve the millennium development goal of halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, we must promote abstinence, faithfulness and use of anti-retroviral drugs and other treatments of opportunistic infections and routine screening of all blood and its product before being used. Although condom helps in preventing HIV/AIDS to some extent, the approach should not be condom promotion, but using conduct in using Condom among selected target groups based on certain indications.

In that same article, I postulated that the reason why Mr. Bush and his hardliners threw away the proposal of promoting Condom may not be unconnected with the fact that the American society is losing potential leaders of tomorrow through reckless and immoral life, just because some group of NGOs and agencies have provided them with *A Licence of Catch Your Fun and be free of HIV/AIDS by Using Condom.*

Coming back to the subject matter under the PEPFAR

project, the United States has entered into agreement with the FGN under the USG/Nigeria partnership for HIV/AIDS relief and under such partnership, a very ambitious project has being unveiled. Entitled *Global HIV/AIDS Initiative in Nigeria (GAIN)*, it is a consortium of international and local development Organisations, notable among them, Family Health International (FHI), Futures Group International, Institute of Human Virology/ Howard University. GAIN is aimed to augment the effort of the federal government's anti-retroviral initiative which started about two to three years ago. The project will be implemented from 2005 to 2009 and will provide anti-retroviral drugs, prevention of mother to child HIV transmission, testing and counselling services, palliative care in the hospital, sexually-transmitted infections management, providing support to orphans and Vulnerable children, Behavioural change communication strategy and procurement of drugs.

The project in the next five years will reach out to about 350 thousand People Living with HIV/AIDS. Although free, they will pay a token of one thousand naira monthly. In the first two years, anti-retroviral therapy will be restricted to only 6 states namely, Kano, Lagos, Abuja, Anambra, Cross River and Edo states, and roll out to the remaining five focal states of PEPFAR (Rivers, Bauchi, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Niger States). The beauty of this project lies on the fact that it will be implemented in secondary health centres owned by the states. In other words, it is decentralised which of course tallies with our repeated recommendation on this page on the need to involve states in this kind of project.

However, despite doffing of my cap to PEPFAR which is expected to reach out to about 350,000 people living with HIV/AIDS, I still have some reservation about this project and a few recommendations. To start with, I don't know the yardstick used in selecting the six focal states to begin with, and also the remaining five states in roll out programme. I can understand selecting Anambra, Edo, Cross Rivers and Abuja. Looking at 2003 HIV Sero-Sentinel Surveillance, the above mentioned states' HIV prevalence is on high side, hence the need to have an intervention there. For Kano and Lagos, one is at lots about the yardstick used. I will be more comfortable with Benue. Without any prejudice, that state needs the support of all of us to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS. In 2001, it topped with respect to HIV prevalence and in 2003, it is among the states with worrisome figure. Other issues that will come off as PEPFAR begins to implement their project would be sustainability beyond 2009, as we all know that withdrawing HIV treatment is far worse than not even commencing it, looking at the side effects of the drugs and resistance. Others like effective monitoring of the project to enable genuine PLWHA to benefit from such and involving the states to also provide counter funding should not be over-emphasised.

Duration of Menses

Please kindly tell me why my menses is only 2 days; not 4 days. I am a mother of two kids.

Thanks

WW.

It is likely that the reason why you are worried is because your colleagues may be having 4 days and above in duration of their menses. Menses may be defined, as a cyclical shedding of the endometrial lining of the uterus (which is ready to receive a fertilized egg) and it is accompanied by passage of blood. It is under the control of neuro-hormonal influence involving the brain, pituitary gland and ovary. Factors that influence menses are climate changes; psychological problems, like fear; infections, to mention few. The normal duration of menses is between 2 to 7 days. Yours is within the normal range. There is no cause for alarm.

Pre-mature ejaculation and remedy

I have a problem of premature ejaculation. What is the cause? I also experience instant release of semen whenever I am with a lady without having any form of contact. Is it a disease and can it be cured? God bless.

SSJOS

This column has received similar questions on that. Without writing all of them, I hope this answer will serve same purpose. Many people with pre-mature ejaculation (inability to maintain erection to enable the partner to be satisfied, or failure to maintain erection for more than 30 seconds or one minutes) are only interested in prescription drugs, which may not help them to alleviate such problem.

The commonest cause of pre-mature ejaculation is anxiety during intercourse; and to alleviate anxiety is to delay intercourse for a while and concentrate on fore-play. Also hostility towards one's partner or fear of failure is all contributory to the dilemma.

Another method to avert pre-mature ejaculation is to temporary use condom that way, movement and sensation will be reduced which will delay ejaculation and ensure the satisfaction of one's partner.

Virginity and Discharge

I have been reading your column for the past two years and I gain a lot out of it. Thanks and more powers to your Elbow. Please I will like to know if there is any way a part from intercourse and accidental cases, a lady can lose her virginity. Secondly, what are the microscopic findings of a female normal discharge?

Nana

A lady is said to be a virgin if she never has any sexual intercourse which is evidenced by the presence of a thin fold of mucous membrane that covers her private part which is called Hymen. Apart from intercourse and accident, hymen can break and tear with time, especially among those that stay very long as spinsters without interacting with the opposite sex. Exercise such as horse riding and jumping can also break the membrane. Also, although very rare, the hymen is absent among some women.

Normal vaginal discharge is a secretion from glands from the uterus, cervix and 2 glands that are lying deep in either side of the vaginal orifice (Bartholins Glands).

What will be seen through the microscope of normal discharge are molecules of water desquamated epithelial cells and very few White Blood Cells and at times, the cells are absent.

Miscarriage and causes

I am 32 years old and married for one and a half years. My wife is a virgin and 21 years old when I marry her. We had our first and second pregnancies during the first six months of our marriage, but both suffered miscarriage. Please I need your advice on what to do

Musa

Miscarriage, which is also called spontaneous abortion, occurs during pregnancy before 28 weeks of gestation. Among the causes are as follows:

Defect in the fetus or embryonic sac: this is the commonest cause of early abortion and it is a defect or malformation of the fetus or its embryonic sac and it could be due to chromosomal abnormalities.

Implantation problem (if the product of conception, egg and the sperm cell that fuse to form the Zygote is implanted very low in the uterus, it is likely to lead to abortion)

Hormonal Deficiency (decrease production of progesterone, a chemical agent produce by the ovary and placenta which maintain pregnancy)

Uterine Abnormalities (at times, there could be congenital malformation of the uterus): a defect that someone is born with.

Dietary Deficiency: if the pregnant mother is anaemic (having low blood level) or is lacking in some vitamins-this could lead to abortion.

High Body temperature, very common and it could be due to malaria, gastrointestinal tract infection, urinary tract infection and respiratory tract infection.

Accident (physical trauma, such as a kick on the tummy or road traffic accident) and psychological shock, such as fear, grief, loss of some one dear by or bad news.

The two last pregnancies are likely to be due to one or combination of the causes itemised. My advice is for you and your wife to relax and accept your fate and you should take her to your gynecologist to reassess her condition. Good luck.

Write in confidence to healthinteractive@hotmail.com or send text message to 08023810589 or P.O. Box 14807, Kano, Nigeria

YOUR HEALTH

Police apprehend fake drug dealers

Stories by Sunday Ejike Benjamin, Health Reporter

The Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Alagbon Close in Lagos is currently interrogating suspected Kano-based fake drugs dealer, Mr. Demian Okoro, for illicit distribution and sale of fake and banned drugs.

The Head of the Public Relations unit of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Abubakar Jimoh, in a statement in Abuja, said Mr. Okoro was

arrested by regulatory officers of the agency following a tip-off from concerned members of the public.

A raid carried out by NAFDAC officers both at the suspect's residence and shop located at Sabon Gari market Kano led to the discovery of more than 50 range and brand of fake drugs which were seized and subsequently evacuated.

The NAFDAC's Director of Enforcement, Mr. Dioka Ejionueme, according to the statement, said some of the fake drugs discovered in the store included Ibufemol, Ampiclox, Metronidazole, Chloramphenicol capsules, Lequine, Flucold capsules, Boscar paracetamol and Medrel Penicillin Ointment.

Two cartons of banned phenylbutazone tablets, he said, were also found in the suspect's residence which he confessed to have smuggled out of his shop at Sabo Gari market in July last year when NAFDAC shut down the entire drug market.

After police interrogation, the statement added, the culprit would be charged to court to face trial for illegal distribution and sale of fake and unregistered drugs. It expressed optimism that if the current enforcement exercise all over the country was sustained the incidence of fake drugs and substandard regulated products would be reduced drastically.

In a related development, a wave of enforcement operations by the regulatory officers of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) had led to the arrest of 22 people in Plateau and Kogi states over fake drugs and other related offences.

14 drug hawkers selling expired and fake drugs were arrested by the NAFDAC officers at Bokkos market in Jos metropolis, and Jengre market in Bassa local

government area of Plateau State.

Similarly, one Mr. Amadi Ezeji and his son were picked up by NAFDAC in connection with the use of an uncompleted building located behind Katakoto market in Jos for illegal manufacture and faking of petroleum Baby Jelly.

The NAFDAC's principal regulatory officer, Mr. Fedilis Nkom who led the enforcement operation, said that over 300 cartons of the fake and unregistered jelly labelled "Noradine" and "rossalin petroleum Jelly" were evacuated from the illegal cosmetics factory.

The fake jelly products he noted were complete imitation of the perfumed realine petroleum jelly and New Havoline Body Jelly already registered by NAFDAC and currently sold in markets.

In Kogi state, one Alhaji Ibrahim Wada and 5 other persons were arrested by the agency for selling fake antibiotic drugs and unregistered sachet water.

The NAFDAC's principal regulatory officer, Mr. John Okwori who made all the arrests, said that some of the culprits, Mrs. Sara Wada, Mrs. Rose Karimu and Mrs. Kerine, were apprehended at Itobe market for selling unregistered sachet water, adding that one Mr. Jibrin Ejigbo, a patent medicine shop owner, was caught with fake vendor licence while several cartons of Oxford Biscuits deceptively labelled to cheat unsuspecting consumers were also seized during the enforcement operation.

The statement warned that the agency would not spare anybody found faking drugs or selling substandard regulated to the public adding that enforcement activities would henceforth be carried to the rural communities just as efforts were in top gear to launch the agency's grassroots consumer's education campaign in Kano next week.



Cross section of delegates during the international drug enforcement conference held in Abuja...recently. Pix: Felix Onigbinde

GSK introduces new pack for Zinnat

From Ikenna Emeka Okpani, Bureau Chief, Port Harcourt

Multinational pharmaceutical company, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has introduced a new pack for its antibiotic Zinnat tablet to the Nigerian market.

According to the company's Marketing and Business Development Director, Mr. Greig Baines, the antibiotic, a brand of Cefuroxime axetil now comes in a smaller pack with a single aluminum blister strip of ten tablets.

He also disclosed that the new pack has a vanished micro-overprint of the GSK logo all over the pack and a tamper-proof seal with the sign "BREAK TO OPEN" written on it. Although it retains the old blue stripe and white colours, the new pack also features the GlaxoSmithKline logo in black print to depict the manufacturer's name.

"Our goal is not only to ensure that consumers have access to the genuine brand at all times but to retain their confidence in the product by presenting the product in a pack they can easily distinguish and associate with.

"Each blister opening of our genuine Zinnat has overwritten "Zinnat tablets 250mg, Cefuroxime axetil" and also bears the GlaxoSmithKline LOT number, expiry date and NAFDAC registration number 04-0433. The changes are however on the pack only. The brand remains the same with its excellent efficacy, convenience and tolerability," Mr. Baines said.

Mr. Baines also disclosed that the new pack has been re-designed with some special security and anti-faking devices to make it difficult to fake or copy.

"With the new features, it will be easy for consumers to tell the difference between our genuine brand whenever they come in contact with fake brands," he further said.

He disclosed that the problem of fake brands has also been linked with the high prevalence of antibiotic resistance in Nigeria and other West African countries. This, according to him, is one of the reasons GSK, as a leading manufacturer of antibiotics worldwide, has risen to the challenge to safeguard its brands while also educating the public on how to identify the genuine products.

Experts fault govt's review of malaria treatment policy

Following the federal government's proposal for a change of chloroquine as a first line drug in the treatment of malaria, a medical practitioner Dr. Emmanuel Abba, has declared that the drug was about the best in malaria treatment if properly formulated.

"The problem we have with chloroquine is not because it is ineffective, but that the active ingredients in the production of the present chloroquine are not adequate and a such, seem to be performing below expectation," Dr. Abba explained while exchanging views with *Daily Trust* in Abuja.

Dr. Abba, who is the medical director of Neman Clinics, Kaduna indicted pharmaceutical companies involved in the production of drugs for producing and marketing sub-standard to drugs in the country.

He explained that in the past, there are 200mg chloroquine base, which is the active ingredient, and pointed out that some pharmaceutical companies now produce chloroquine with less than 200mg base.

He noted that doctors administering such drugs with ingredients less than what is required will not know. This, he said would not augur well for patients placed on such drugs.

Dr. Abba observed that what led to pharmaceutical companies producing drugs that are sub-standard is the economic downturn in the country where inflation is always on the increase, "and to make little profit on drugs produced, resort to managing the ingredients, not minding the consequences of such act on patients, in order to maximise profits."

The medical practitioner called on government to provide an enabling environment to enable drug manufacturers in the country do so in the interest of Nigerians, just as he charged the Nigeria Institute of Pharmaceutical Research (NIPR) to go into research with a view to producing chloroquine drugs that can meet Nigerian standard, pointing out that by the time chloroquine is phased out and the Artemisinin based

combination is introduced, this may lead to more deaths as a result of the non-affordability of the drug by the masses of the country.

"Considering the availability of resources in this country, our pharmaceutical research unit should be able to produce chloroquine that we can use in this country, with the required active ingredients," Dr. Abba pointed out.

The medical practitioner said if not for National Agency for Food Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), 50% of Nigerian population would have been rendered incurable patients because of fake and sub-standard drugs that find their way into the country.

He chided government for proposing a review of Malaria treatment policy in favour of Artemisinin Combination Therapy, noting that what the government needs to be looking at is to see the possibility of producing chloroquine in the country.

Nigeria he noted has the wherewithal to produce all these things in the interest of both the country and its citizens.

Minister gives recipe for health sector improvement

The Minister of State for Health, Princes Olufunke Adedoyin, has said that annual increments of salaries of healthcare providers as well as improving the working and living conditions of Nigerians, especially rural dwellers, would boost the performance in the nation's health sector.

Already, she noted that the High Level Forum (HLF) on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has identified shortfalls in the health workforce, drug supply, health financing, lack of donor coordination and weak information systems as critical challenges to achieving the health MDGs in Nigeria.

Princes Adedoyin, who was addressing a consensus building of the Presidential Initiative on Health Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria recently in Abuja also pointed out that

the success of the MDGs, out of which, six are health related and dependent, required major improvement in health systems and outcome across the country.

The minister called for the promotion of reproductive health and also stressed the need for adequate attention to sexual and reproductive health in all development and poverty reduction debates and policies in the country.

Diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS which are part of the MDGs, she said, had alternative sources of funding, while material and child health activities did not. He pointed out that that explains why the World Bank agreed to waive the state governments' counterpart funding to facilitate speedy utilisation of the funds, ensure the complete disbursement of the funds, by the end of this year.

Also speaking at the occasion, the representative of the Country Director of the World Bank, Mrs. Anne

Okigbo-Fisher noted that Nigeria indicators on both material and child mortality indicators, are even worse than those from post-conflict countries.

The central mission of the World Bank, according to Mrs. Okigbo-fisher was to fight poverty in all its implications noting that the bank was working in collaboration with the government of Nigeria to address the task of improving the nation's health sector through the health systems development project. This project she said was targeted at reducing both maternal and infant mortality, ensuring access to quality services and to also address human resource/capacity issues.

Earlier in his opening address, the Director, Health Planning and Research of the Federal Ministry of Health, Dr. Shehu Sule, stressed the need of embarking on cost effective intervention that would have desired impact on major causes of diseases through integrated care.

Malaria parasite resistance not peculiar to Nigeria -Lambo

The Minister of Health, Prof. Eyitayo Lambo, has said that the resistant of malaria parasite to chloroquine was not only peculiar to Nigeria alone, but has been spreading over the years from Asia to East Africa and other parts of African continent.

Prof. Lambo made this declaration recently in Abuja while briefing newsmen on the review of national malaria treatment, noting that a drug efficacy studies carried out on chloroquine in malaria treatment showed that the national average for efficacy of chloroquine was 39.2 percent, implying 60.8 per cent failure rate of the drug.

He said it was in view of this discovery and the high death rate as a result of malaria that the federal government put together a proposal for a change in favour of an Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) as a first line, drug in

the treatment of Malaria, instead of chloroquine.

Lambo, who quickly added that the proposal did not mean that chloroquine was banned, further stated that, "after conducting the drug therapeutic efficacy trials, new choice of drugs was considered and the therapeutic efficacy of the drugs were also tested to confirm this". He explained that the result of this exercise was analysed in November last year which led to the approval in principle to change the first line drug.

In ensuring the success of the final and the transition phase of the process of malaria treatment policy change, the Ministry of Health, according to Lambo, would set up a multidisciplinary committee to moderate the challenging and intensive process that would lead to the implementation of the new policy.

YOUR HEALTH

Africa's health systems compounds threat of communicable diseases – Lambo

The fragile nature of health systems in African countries, occasioned by limited health workers contributed in compounding the threat posed by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, Malaria and other communicable diseases in the region.

The minister of health, Prof. Eytayo Lambo who made this observation in an address he presented at the

VOA campaigns against HIV/AIDS spread

From Mohammed Abubakar, Correspondent (Gombe)

The Hausa Service of the voice of America (VOA) has organized an awareness campaign on the danger and spread of HIV/AIDS for the Northeast subregion of Nigeria in Billiri local government area of Gombe State.

The campaign tagged grassroot HIV/AIDS summit was characterized by drama and discussions by community leaders, victims and health officials on issues related to the disease.

In her speech, the president of the Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS in the state, Mrs. Biaratu Abubakar, urged those who have the scourge to speak out.

Mrs. Abubakar, a nurse with the specialist Hospital, Gombe who tested positive to HIV four years ago, said stigmatization is destroying the psychic of victims.

She called on the public to stop discriminating against people living with HIV/AIDS as not all people who contacted the disease did so through questionable means.

The occasion had in attendance a traditional ruler, the Mai of Tangale, Dr. Aledu Buba Maisharu II, who was commended by the organizers and other NGOs for his efforts in the fight against the scourge of HIV/AIDS in the area which is one of the local government areas with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the state.

By Sunday Ejike Benjamin, Health Reporter

African regional dialogue on health equity, human resources and health development in Abuja held recently in Abuja also noted that the resolution of Africa's human resource challenge is fundamental in the effort to strengthen and improve the performance of the continent's health systems.

According to him, human resource development will ultimately improve the capacity of the continent to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and reverse the vicious circle of poverty, ill-health and underdevelopment bedeviling African countries.

He said Africa's 784 million people continue suffering from a huge burden of potentially preventable and treatable disease, which he noted, do not only cause unnecessary death and suffering, but also stifles economic development and damages the continent's social fabric.

Prof. Lambo corroborated the global joint initiative on human resources for health reports that, "while 25% of the global burden disease is African, its share of the global health workforce is 1.3% thereby limiting its ability to deliver qualitative health care especially in the public sector."

He identified international migration, internal displacements of health workforce out of the public sector and also from the health sector to others that provide greater economic satisfaction and motivation as factors that contributed to this development.

The health minister posited that an action plan

to respond to Africa's human resource basis in the health sector calls for country action and a need to increase African workforce by 1 million by the end of 2010. African government, he said must turn inwards to improve work conditions, provide working tools for health workforce and ensure that public administration guidelines and macro-economic environment are work-friendly in order to retain workers produced.

While stressing the need to engage traditional and new partners in readvocacy for increased aid and investment in African health systems at the global level, Lambo further noted that global platform for experience sharing, learning, technical support and

resources mobilization such as provided by the partnership management are also central to the continent's ability to share models that work.

The African regional dialogue on health equity, human resources and development in African put together by the African Council for Sustainable Development (ACOSHED) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was designed to among other things to review the action plan presented by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as the common framework for response to health crisis in Africa and to also suggest how this can be improved as well as actions that should take place at country level.

NGOs, CBOs' activities in combating HIV/AIDS scourge get commendation

The chairman, Benue State Action Committee on AIDS, Dr. F.K. Ijir has observed that activities of non governmental and community based organization are vital forces which direct government's efforts and attention on development and service delivery in the country.

Dr. Ijir who was speaking in Lafia recently on the role of non-governmental organizations in combating HIV/AIDS, pointed out that combined strategies of coalition of government, civil Society and religious groups as well as that of organized private sector have considerably stemmed the high prevalence of HIV.

"Because citizens are usually antagonistic to government owing to bad governance and lack of faith, programmes about HIV/AIDS put out by NGOs and CBOs seem to be more acceptable than those by mainstream government

agencies," the Benue State Action Committee on AIDS noted and added that Benue State's collaborative efforts with civil society in HIV/AIDS campaign has been quite successful

This effort, he noted was responsible for the significant drop of HIV prevalence from 13.5% in 2001 to 9.3% in November 2003, explaining that Benue State government is considering the expansion of its support to NGOs and CBOs in the state.

"We are proposing to support three CBOs in each of the 23 local government areas of the state in addition to those on ground," Dr. Ijir disclosed saying that NGOs and CBOs in the state have proved themselves honest, transparent, committed, capable and effective in the fight against HIV/AIDS and other developmental programmes.

In a related development, the Nasarawa state Commissioner for health and the SACA Vice Chairman for the state, Dr. Mohammed Ahmed lamented the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on the nation's social and economic life.

Dr. Ahmed who was speaking in Lafia recently on the occasion of the grass-roots HIV/AIDS summit organized by the Voice of America (VOA) in conjunction with Nasarawa state government, pointed out that the disease is more prevalent among people with low socio-economic status, just as he observed that the people at the grassroots are still plagued by denial and misinformation about the HIV/AIDS.

The Nasarawa state government, he noted will soon inaugurate the local government Action Committee on AIDS the community Action Committees on AIDS as means of effectively combating the scourge of the disease.



INDIGESTION IDYSPEPSIA

Very common ailments. They are resultant effects of disorders in the stomach or intestine probably caused by overeating, especially fatty foods, or bad habits such as talking while chewing and excessive spicy foods. Symptoms experienced include flatulence (gas), pain, and nausea vomiting and belching.

The following herbs are useful:

Carminatives: They aid relaxation of the gut wall thus giving relief to the colic pains. These include:

1. Lemon balm: The fresh leaves (15-30g) are made into tea. Use 1 teacup three times daily.

2. Basil: (Efinrin) [Yoruba], *Dodoya* [Rausa], *Nchianwu* [Igbo], cloves/ginger/curry leaves, stinging nettle, catnip, and chamomile. Any of these infusions is taken as 1 glass in the morning and in the evening. These are all available and affordable.

3. Sorrel: (*Zobo* [Rausa]): These leaves are rich in vitamin C and stimulate digestion. This is taken as a refreshing drink or as tea; takes three cups daily.

4. Parsley: Few sprigs of fresh herbs or Y4 teaspoons of dried leaves taken with a glass of warm water will relieve indigestion.

5. Honey: Two spoonfuls of honey three times daily aid digestion after food. Food is advised to be chewed thoroughly to aid digestion.

6. *Aloe vera/pawpaw* leaves: The extract of these leaves in water is taken as Y4 cup on empty stomach morning and evening to facilitate bowel movement.

7. Fruits: As a general principle, fruits aid digestion. Fruits and vegetables such as pawpaw, spinach, carrots and garden eggs are eaten to aid digestion. Also, juice of a lemon in a glass of warm water taken first thing in the morning stimulates the liver and aids digestion. Similarly, fresh pineapple juice (bromelin), pawp (papain) are good sources of digestive enzymes, thus promoting digestion. ...

8. West African locust beans (*Dorawa* [Hausa], *Ogirili* [Igbo]) fruit pulp is given as a carminative two to three times daily.

9. Climbing black pepper (*Masoro* [Hausa], *Ozizi* [Igbo], *Iyere* [Yoruba]) - Powdered berries is mixed with honey and taken as one to two teaspoonfuls three times daily.

10. Pride of Barbados (*Ararrabi* [Hausa]): Decoction of leaves or bark is taken as one glass daily.

11. Catnip: The infusion of catnip leaves is drunk after meals to aid digestion.

12. Apple: Cider vinegar is obtained from the fruit. 1 teaspoonful of honey in a cup of warm water, mixed with 1 teaspoonful of cider vinegar aids digestion when sipped slowly, preferably twenty to thirty minutes before meals.

13. Potatoes: Chewing a piece of raw potato slowly or blending promotes digestion because it acts as an antacid and antispasmodic.

IRRITABLE BOWEL MOVEMENT

Very common health condition. It is a digestive disorder that could present as constipation, abdominal pain or any form of stomach discomfort; often associated with loose stool. Prevailing symptoms include mucus in stools, nausea, anorexia etc.

Treatment

1. Bitters obtained from garden egg (*Yalo* [Hausa] and Indian tamarind (*Tsamiya* Hausa) mixed together and taken as half glass three times daily for 2-3 days will serve as a bowel cleanser.

2. Infusion of basil leaves (*Ejinrin* [Yoruba]), and mint leaves taken as half glass two-three times daily relieves and soothes the bowel.

3. Infusion of lemon grass and stinging nettle is taken (2-3) times daily.

Hajiya Zainab Sheriff writes from Zee's Herbal Pharmacy, Suite 12, Angels Plaza, Garki II, Abuja.
E-mail:-zeeherbal@zwallot.com



Health Minister, Prof. Eytayo Lambo being conducted round the premises and facilities of the President Bush Emergency Plan for Aids Relief in Africa (PEPFAR) Centre at the National Institute for Medical Research, Yaba Lagos by the director of the Institute, Dr. Oni Idigbe ... recently

ABUJA TRUST



Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON) confiscating second hand tyres at Zuba spare parts market...recently.

NURTW lauds exit of Balogun

The National Union of Road Transport Workers has praised the federal government for removing the former Inspector General of Police Mr. Tafa Balogun.

The association made this remark through Malam Inuwa Abubakar in a chat with our correspondent in Abuja recently. Malam Inuwa Abubakar described the removal as a good omen.

He said that the tenure of the former IG witnessed a catalogue of crises, which was unprecedented in the history of security in Nigeria.

Malam Inuwa who he is an influential member of the

By Ebenezer John Buoro, (Intern)

Nigerian Union of Road Transport Workers said that the new Inspector General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, should strive hard to sanitise the Nigeria Police Force in order to redeem the battered image of the police.

He said, "With Ehindero's antecedents, Nigerians will surely witness a 'new dawn' in the force, especially with the changing of the police slogan, operation fire-for-fire with po-

licing with integrity." Inuwa advise the new IGP to set up committees that will look into the various problems of the force with a view of getting solution.

Inuwa further urged Nigerians to assist the new IGP in giving out information on criminals and crises formation.



Tafa Balogun, former IGP

Wuse market: Traders lose N2bn, demand compensation

Traders in the old Wuse market whose shops were demolished by authorities of the FCT have put the cost of goods destroyed during the exercise at N2 billion and have demanded that compensation be paid to owners of legally acquired shops that were demolished.

Officials of the Wuse Market Reconciliation Com-

mittee, who disclosed this at the weekend, said that the authorities of the FCT should compensate traders with title documents, who were not notified of the impending demolition exercise and had their shops pulled down.

Alhaji Haliru Bukhari, and Mr. Emmanuel Odom, chairman and secretary of

the committee, said traders of perishable goods like groceries lost over N2 million worth of items, as their shops were demolished along with the goods inside them.

"Some shops demolished were not marked for demolition because they were legally allocated and title documents duly issued.

"That compensation be given to traders in cash and land allocated to them to build new shops, especially to those with title documents and were not given any notice of demolition," the traders said.

Moreover, the traders implored government to always take them into consideration when making policies that will affect them.

"As a registered body, we expect government to formally communicate with us and for them to involve us in any action that affects traders, instead of a unilateral action. We want an alternative place for the displaced traders to enable them earn a living," they stated.

The representatives of the traders also, pleaded with the FCT Minister, Malam Nasir el-Rufai to stop the current demolition exercise, as it

was not only restricted to attachments and illegally developed shops within the market.

Another demand by the

traders is the immediate re-opening of the closed market, as traders are losing income while FCT residents are finding it difficult to shop.

...may open tomorrow

There are strong indications that the old Wuse Market might be reopened tomorrow after its closure for over a week by the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA).

This was made known yesterday by officials of FCDA and the Ministry of the Federal Capital Territory at the market while addressing traders

According to Hajiya Hadiza Abdullahi, the director of Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB), some traders will be compensated and given loans.

She also called on the traders to come to the market to tidy up their shops particularly those whose shops were affected in the process of the demolition. She further revealed that shop owners are to report with relevant documents showing proof of ownership for verification.

Also, Alhaji Tijani Abdullahi, the chairman of Abuja Investment and Property Development Company, said that the FCT minister has handed over the market to AIPC to manage.

According to him, in the next four to six months, about 500 shops will be built inside the market and will be allocated to the traders with legal documents whose shops were affected.

The chairman, Abuja Market Management Company, Mr. Mike Okbo, who also ad-

By Maimuna Yusuf Reporter (Abuja Trust)

new security company, Rabid Vigil, has been chosen to take charge of the security of the market and traders will have to pay service charge monthly as soon as things normalised.

However, for the container attachment owners it was all hope dashed as most of them left the meeting disappointed and furious.

According to Mallam Ismail Mai Zobe, a trader whose shop was demolished, he thought there was going to be a compensation for his property and container shop.

Most shop owners quickly resumed work, clearing and fixing their iron doors, while others were seen painting their shops.

British Council entertains city residents

The British Council, Abuja, last Friday entertained city residents with a play performed by the Jos Repertory Theatre. The play, titled *Our House*, used new theatre manoeuvres to portray the rot that has eaten into the Nigerian nation. An audience of arts enthusiasts, journalists, members of the intelligentsia and expatriates watched the presentation.

Directed by Patrick-Jude Oteh, *Our House*, which was

By Crispin Oduobuk, Group Literary Editor

Council's premises at Maitama, Abuja, had Emmanuel Degri and Nancy Eloh Oholi in the cast. Other members of the cast were Anne Ewarewah, Nelson Orah and Godwin Ogbaka. Playing for about an hour, the five-member cast took on multiple roles and gave creative interpretations to various aspects of the Nigerian experience since independence. Unique to the stage production of *Our House*, the Jos Repertory Theatre worked with a fluid

sitions that kept the play moving apace.

With Austin Okonkwo as the stage manager, Tongak Titus seeing to the music and technical matters handled by Ayo Salako, the play revolves around the reunion of family where the reuniting siblings remember a wistful past, take pleasure in the contemporariness of their homecoming and contemplate the future. Thematically, *Our House* is clearly a metaphor for the Nigerian nation. As earlier mentioned, the thematic concern of the play is Nigeria's degeneration with a prescription for the way for-

Bakassi Market traders brace up for demolition

Traders at the Wuse new market popularly known as Bakassi Market are bracing up for demolition sequel to the deadline given to them to relocate to Dei-Dei along the Abuja-Zuba road.

The chairman of the Wuse New Market Association, Alhaji Aminu Musa, who spoke to *Abuja Trust* yesterday, said that traders at the market were issued notification letters last Friday at the Garki, Area 10 Old Parade

Ground. He said that the list of eligible candidates have been released and they have collected their letters, and they are to pay the required N11,000 fee for allocation, and N18,000 for annual rent.

The letter of allocation, the chairman said, was released by the authorities of the Ministry of the Federal Capital Territory, signed by A.C. Ike for the minister, and that allocation will be renewed every five years.

The chairman told our reporter that FCDA staff and traders union will sit together and form a committee that will listen to complain from legitimate traders to proffer solution to their problems.

Alhaji Aminu said that government is making effort to provide all social amenities needed in Dei-Dei particularly water supply, electricity and roads, in order to meet up the demand of both traders and customers who require such services.

Some traders however expressed dissatisfaction over the conduct of the verification exercise carried out last week.

One of the traders, simply called Joseph, expressed dismay that some of them were not in town when the officials requested for the submission of their passports and names and therefore doubts if a space will be

Kubwa market traders invite el-Rufai

Traders at Kubwa Phase 4 Market have appealed to the Federal Capital Territory minister, Mallam Nasir el-Rufai to visit the market for assessment.

The market committee chairman, Pastor George Ogbeide, told judicial correspondents in Abuja yesterday that they want the minister to visit the contentious area in order to determine violation of the master plan.

Kemi Ogedengbe, Judiciary Editor

He said that the location of the market in the master plan was where the current market is located, adding that other allocations like banks, offices, lorry parks and fire services have been taking over by private developers.

He added that the traders have not encroached into the master plan saying that the minister was misinformed and misled on the issue.

Pastor Ogbeide said that the traders were in possession of the building plan, payment of revenue and supervision notice by the Bwari area council. "The truth of the matter is that of all the structures in the Kubwa master plan, the market and the general post office are the only ones that meet the actual specification in the master plan, based on the structure on the ground now."

Meanwhile, Justice Binta Murtala Nyako of the Federal High Court Abuja, has adjourned hearing in the suit by the traders against the FCT

KANO TRUST

Gwale pays workers N40m monthly

The Chairman of Gwale local government council, Alhaji Sani Jibjin Kofar Naisa, has revealed that the sum of N40m is expended monthly on workers in the local government council as salaries and wages. Alhaji Naisa acknowledged that after paying as much as N23m to over 1,600 teachers in 99 primary schools and N19m to other local government staff on monthly basis, the council was virtually left with 'mere stipend.' He said that the other five local gov-

ernment councils within the Kano metropolis were similarly overburdened with high salaries and wages. Alhaji Naisa attributed the over-concentration of workers in these local governments to the workers' unwillingness to accept redeployment to other stations. He called on the state government to distribute staff evenly to all the 44 local government councils in the state to ensure 'balance and convenience' in the payment of wages and salaries.

Madobi LG employs 30 health personnel

The Chairman of Madobi local government council of Kano state, Alhaji Musa Ilyasu Kwankwaso, has revealed that the council employed 30 additional health personnel to improve healthcare delivery in the area. Addressing the newly employed personnel, he said the gesture was to ensure that the healthcare programmes introduced by the state government (present administration) had direct impact on the masses. Alhaji Kwankwaso urged the personnel to reciprocate the gesture by working hard. He advised them to desist from all irresponsible acts that could undermine the objective of their assignment and warned that drastic action would be taken against any one of them that displayed a nonchalant attitude to his or her work. He disclosed that the sum of N500,000 per

month had been earmarked for the purchase of various drugs for the health centres in the area. Alhaji Kwankwaso promised to implement all meaningful projects introduced by the state government (present administration) as part of his administration's policy of developing Madobi local council in all fields of human endeavour.

Speaking on same the occasion, the Kano State Commissioner for Local Government, Alhaji Sani Abdullahi Rogo, pledged to approve all projects aimed at developing the local government areas. On his part, the district head of the Madobi local government area, Alhaji Musa Sale (Majidadi of Kano) called on the newly appointed health personnel to see their assignment as a service to humanity. He commended the chairman for executing people-oriented projects.



Kofar Mata in kano, usually turns into a political billboard by political office seekers before elections.

The Kano State Governor, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau, has announced that the state government will enact a law to regulate the activities of *achaba* riders in the state. He declared this while marking the beginning of *Muharram*, the first month of the Islamic calendar. Mallam Shekarau described the regulation of *achaba* riders as necessary to curtail road accidents due to reckless driving, which had sent too many innocent souls to their graves. The governor

KNSG to enact law on *achaba* riders

Stories by Ahmed Abubakar, Reporter Kano

also reiterated his government's commitment to the maintenance of law and order in the state through the training of more *Hisbah* personnel to complement the ef-

forts of the police force. He commended the *Sharia* and *Zakkat* commission for rekindling the spirit of *Sharia*, and urged Muslims to be Godly and contribute towards the

development of *Sharia* in the state.

Also speaking on the occasion, the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero, urged Muslims in the state to reflect on their past lives and make amends to suit the teachings of Islam.

13 wards to get projects in municipal LG

The Supervisory Councillor for Works in the Kano municipal local council, Alhaji Nasiru Zubeiru, has stated that no fewer than 13 wards in the municipality were to benefit from the N54m development projects planned by the council. He said that N31m would be spent on the Sharada-Tukuntawa road project, and confirmed that payment for the contract had already been made. Alhaji Nasiru explained that the re-

maining N23m would be spent on the construction of drainages and culverts, water supply, and electrification projects across the municipality. He announced that work had already commenced on water pipe extension at Jakara, Mazankwarai, Tundun-Nufara, and Makwaarari wards with a view to supplying the communities with potable water. He added that while other wards have been allocated electric transformers as part of the council's

efforts to link them up with electricity, some are to benefit from the construction of drainages and culverts to prevent flood disaster in the area. The councillor, who assured his audience that he would fulfill his electoral pledges, said that the award of contracts for the projects would be completed soon. He called on those wards that had not benefitted from the on-going projects to remain calm, as plans were underway to 'attend to them.'



Kano cultural troupe performing at Banker's Award night...recently

Pix: Musa Kazaure



Kano state governor, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau, standing for the national anthem at the passing out parade of Nigerian Military School, Zaria...recently

EKO TRUST

Lagos approves kola pod cottage industry for Ikorodu

The Lagos State government has approved the installation of a multipurpose kola pod husk based cottage industry in the Igbokuta area of Imota, Ikorodu.

The scheme executed by the Rural Entrepreneurship Development and Employment Promotion Programme in conjunction with the Centre for Rural Development is aimed at improving on the living conditions of residents of the state in rural areas and reduce their influx to urban areas.

The commissioner for Rural Development in the state, Dr. Tola Kasali who performed the foundation laying of the cottage industry at Imota, said his

ministry was making all efforts to ensure that development in the rural areas improves alongside development in the urban areas.

According to him, "The establishment of the cottage is a demonstration of the state government's agenda to bring a viable waste-to-wealth project to the state. This multipurpose machine for the cottage industry is the first of its kind in Nigeria.

"It is integrated to accommodate an alternator for electricity generator and other grinding activities".

He said with the over 100 rural electrification schemes in place in various rural areas of the state it was obvious the state government

treasured development of those parts.

He called on the various stakeholders to seize the opportunity created by the project to improve their social and economic well-being.

The director of the CERUD, Mr. Nurudeen Yusuf said the project was the collaborative effort of the CERUD and Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria, Ibadan.

The police in Lagos State have warned all members of the outlawed Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) about the consequences of the recent clashes among its factions in some parts of the state, which had left three people dead and several others wounded. The spokesman, Lagos State Police Command, Mr. Adebayo Ademola (DSP), stated this in a statement over the weekend. He said that the command would not standby and watch the security of the state

Police warn OPC factions over bloody clashes

By Adelanwa Bamgboye, Correspondent (Lagos)

undermined by hoodlums under whatever guise.

According to him, the leaders of the two factions, Dr. Fredrick Fasheun and Gani Adams, had been contacted and warned by the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Israel Ajao, about the consequences of their actions.

"On Wednesday, February 9, 2005, information was received at the Lagos State police headquarters that there was a clash between the two factions of the OPC, resulting from a misunderstanding which arose during a meeting purportedly organised to broker peace between the two factions. Our timely intervention prevented what could have been a major breakdown of law and order.

"Intelligence report gathered on Thursday, February 10, 2005, revealed that a meeting was held in a hotel at Isolo by a faction that suffered the most casualties in the previous clash, during which a reprisal attack was planned against the other faction. The attack was planned to be launched from Alasalatu area of Mushin, with Ejigbo as the first target.

"Armed with this report, we were able to nip the attack on Ejigbo in the bud, while we conducted a raid on Alasalatu at 1300 hours of Friday, February 11, 2005."

During the raid, the police spokesman said two shot guns, seven cutlasses, two jerry cans of petrol, several charms and large quantities of weed suspected to be Indian hemp were recovered.

He added that nine of the hoodlums were arrested after a resistance, which left six policemen wounded as a result of gun shots received from the OPC members. Mr. Ademola stressed that the Nigeria Police Force was created and saddled with the responsibility of law enforcement and protection of lives and property. He said that where policemen were shot at in the course of performing their lawful duties should be regarded as testing the will of the state, consequences of which might be severe.

"Our detectives are on the trail of the perpetrators of the mayhem, which left three people dead between February 9 and 10 at Ikotun and Ejigbo respectively. They shall be made to face the full wrought of the law as soon as they are arrested."

He however urged all Lagosians to go about their lawful businesses without fear of molestation as their security was assured. He further urged law abiding citizens to report to the nearest police station any strange movements or suspicious characters whenever sighted. He added that the police were poised to serve and protect all Nigerians with integrity more than ever before.

In a swift reaction, Dr. Fredrick Fasheun accused the police of not responding on time after they were informed of the incident.



Lagosians at the National Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos to watch movies during the last sallah celebrations. Pix: Oladipupo Odunewu.

Electronic tax clearance certificate for Lagos taxpayers

The newly introduced electronic tax clearance certificate, (ETCC), by the Lagos State government will henceforth be issued to taxpayers in the state.

Disclosing this to the participants in a workshop organised by the state ministry of finance at the weekend, chairman, implementation committee on ETCC, Mrs. Modupe Olukolu, said the scheme would allow effectiveness and efficiency in tax collection and payments in the state.

The ETCC projects, which was launched in the state in October last year was meant to automate the revenue base of the state, and also to remove bottlenecks in the tax administration in the state.

Welcoming stakeholders, which include heads of tax stations, top functionaries of state government, embassies staff and other members of the public, Olukolu said the essence of the workshop is to enlighten all the stakeholders on the operations and technical details of the ETCC.

According to her, the project was being embarked upon primarily to reduce waste, time and to eliminate fraud in the system.

"The Lagos State government, as a pace setter had once again, through this project showing the light in utilising modern technology to enhance transparency in governance."

According to the consultant-presenter, the website is divided into two modes; the normal mode, which is "an all user platform," and audit mode with a secure log-on protocol.

The second mode permits only the authorized users to access the menus.

Commending the introduction of the new scheme, the Swiss Embassy's representative, Mr. Eric I. K., said there is need for clarification on the issue of password for the card reader and access level.

LASG berates NCP over call to dissolve LGs

Lagos State government has described the National Conscience Party's call for the dissolution of the existing 57 local government areas in the state as a disgrace to populist politics.

In a statement signed by the chief press secretary, Mr. Segun Ayobolu, issued in Alausa on Sunday, the state government said NCP's position on reverting back to the 20 local government areas is motivated by narrow, selfish partisan greed.

The statement equally described as reckless, the position of the party urging citizens of the state to refuse to pay taxes and levies.

Ayobolu warned Lagosians to be wary of saboteurs hiding behind party flags to disrupt peace and order in the state.

Noting that the party started on a platform for popular agitation, he said its recent romance with the neo-conservative forces of the People's Democratic Party is condemnable.

"An unholy conspiracy to kill the people-oriented 57 local governments is a marriage of strange bedfellows that will certainly end in acrimonious divorce".

It regretted that NCP had turned itself into "a willing tool of the despotic, dictatorial and unpopular

charlatans of the PDP in Lagos State and abandoned its populist pretences for a mess of PDP's porridge".

The state government said the party should not allow its electoral failure to paralyse its radical thinking, enjoining it to review its position on the creation of local government areas in the state

"Every mass oriented

political party must align its interest with the aspirations of the common man on the street. The local governments of Lagos State are the products of the aspirations of the citizens of Lagos State to bring government closer to them. The AD controlled government of Lagos State is proud to be the historic

facilitator of this dream into reality," he said.

"They want to defeat Lagosians with the brutal might of the federal government but even the Bible tells us that it is possible for David to defeat Goliath. Our cause is just. Our case is solid. Lagosians shall win this battle in the courts and on the battlefield of politics".

Police arrest bizman with corpse inside car

Lagos businessman in whose car the corpse of a young man was found Friday morning had been arrested by the police in Lagos. The suspect simply identified as Chukwuma was arrested by a team of anti-robbery policemen attached to Ilesamaja Police Station at Hassan bus stop, Ilesamaja, at about 1:00 am that fateful day.

Eko Trust reliably gathered that Chukwuma, a resident of 17, Moshalashi Street, Ilesamaja, was travelling in his Audi 80 saloon car with registration number: AQ833DKA, with the corpse hidden under his front seat with blood stain, when the police patrol team halted for routine checks. He was consequently arrested and detained at Ilesamaja

By Bola Ojuola, Reporter (Lagos)

Police Station where investigations to his matter were already going on.

The Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Ademola Adebayo, who confirmed the arrest, said the corpse was found with a bullet wound on the head. He stated further that investigations would reveal the circumstances that led to the incident.

In a related development, the corpse of one Mrs. Adamu Hasima, a resident of Ketu Mile 12, was also found in a container same day. Eko Trust learnt that the late Hasima had left home on Wednesday morning to collect her children's photograph at the nearby Agility market, but never

returned. Her remains were later found in a container converted into a shop.

The owner of the shop, Mrs. Victoria Emilere, and some other persons had seen been arrested.

The PPRO, who confirmed the arrest, said the deceased might have fallen victim of ritual killers.



Sunday Ehindaro, IGP

The management of
FAWAZ STEEL WOOD AND CHEMICALS LTD
CONGRATULATES



Alh. Ibrahim Salim, CON

**The clerk to the National Assembly on his
conferment of Honorary Degree of LLD
Honoris causa by the University of Jos on
Saturday, 12th February, 2005.**

Signed
Management of
Fawaz steelwood and Chemicals ltd

Bompai Industrial Area
Kano State.



NASARAWA STATE GOVERNMENT

*Happy 30th
Coronation Anniversary*

On Behalf of my family, the Government and good people of Nasarawa State, I congratulate Your Royal Highness, **ALHAJI (DR.) SHEHU IDRIS**, Emir of Zazzau on the 30th Anniversary of your accession to the throne.

We thank Almighty Allah for the wisdom and grace He has given you to steer the affairs of the great and expansive Zazzau Emirate which has grown during your reign to heights of splendor and economic magnitude. We are particularly delighted that your 30-year reign in this citadel of Northern history and learning has contributed tremendously to the social, economic and political growth of Nigeria.

We pray Almighty Allah to grant you good health, long life and wisdom to continue to advance the frontiers of peace and development in the Zazzau emirate and in Nigeria as a whole.

Happy 30th Anniversary

Signed
Alhaji (Dr.) Abdullahi Adamu
Executive Governor
Nasarawa State



**His Royal Highness,
ALHAJI (DR.) SHEHU IDRIS, CFR
Emir of Zazzau**



**His Excellency,
Alhaji (Dr.) Abdullahi Adamu
Executive Governor,
Nasarawa State**



FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE (FDGG)

House of Representatives, National Assembly, Abuja

marks its first year with a Roundtable on

DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Justice C. Oputa (Rtd)

RULE OF LAW, LEADERSHIP & DEMOCRACY

VENUE

Yar'adua Centre, Abuja

DATE

Thursday, 17 February, 2005

TIME

9.30 am

SPEAKERS & DISCUSSANTS

- Rt Hon. Senator Anyim Pius Anyim: **CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE.**
- Dr Jibo Ibrahim: **PROMOTING A GRASSROOTS CONSTITUTIONAL AGENDA.**
- Dr Usman Bugaje: **OBJECTIVES OF ROUNDTABLE.**
- Discussants include: Hon. Prof. Sola Adeyeye, Hon. Mrs. Nkechi Nwaogu, Mr Adams Oshiomole, NLC President, Hon. Dr Haruna Yerima, Mrs Nkoyo Toyo, Hon. Abdul Oroh, Mr Alisa Agbakoba, Dr Sule Kano ASUU & Dr Chidi Odinkalu, OSIWA.

in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Foundation

News

FG to procure seven asphalt plants

The federal government has signed the contract for the direct procurement of seven asphalt plants with a UK-based company, Parker Plant Limited, for the sum of N1.085 billion.

The Minister of Works, Senator Adeseye Ogunlewe who signed the contract on behalf of the federal government in his office, said that the federal executive council early this year approved the award of the contract for the purchase of seven brand new supermobile Asphalt Plants.

The minister said that the procurement of 7 nos 60-70 tonne per hour mobile Asphalt Plants will not only sustain the tempo of the maintenance/repair works in

By Nasir Imam (Property & Environment Editor)

progress, but will lay the foundation towards building the much desired local engineering capacity for the participation of Nigeria engineers in road maintenance, rehabilitation and construction.

Senator Ogunlewe also said that considering the huge investment to be made in procuring such plants, the complexity of their operation and maintenance, it was considered risky to entrust such plants to government establishments.

He therefore said that his ministry was in dialogue with the Nigeria Society of Engineers (NSE) and the Council for the Regulation

of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), who in association with reputable Nigerian companies would form a consortia to handle the operation and maintenance of these plants.

The company's Secretary and Director, Parker Plant Ltd, Mr Simon Wilkinson, in his address at the occasion, said the seven Asphalt Plants would be brand new plants with a capacity of up to 80 tonnes per hours.

The plant are to be located at Ibadan, Uyo, Yola, Enugu, Gusau, Lokoja and Lagos.



The National Emergency Management Authority aircraft commissioned by President Obasanjo at the Eagles Square Abuja...Recently
Pix: Joe Oroye

NEMA acquires N1.1bn helicopter

By Reuben Yunana, Senior Reporter (State House)

President Olusegun Obasanjo had commissioned the National Emergency Management Agency's Search and Rescue Helicopter acquired at a cost of N1.1 billion, saying with this development, the agency had now moved from post disaster intervention to a comprehensive risk based emergency management programme.

The president recalled that over one year ago, he had commissioned the COSPAS-

SARSAT, Nigeria Mission Control Centre (MCC) at the Agency's corporate headquarters which has been an equipment of pride to centre (MCC) and the search and rescue helicopter, NEMA could now adopt a pro-active approach to its disaster management mandate in line with the trend all over the world.

He said the MI-17-IV Helicopter has in built facilities for effective search and rescue operations, equipped with 22,000, litres of water for extinguishing fires as well as a capacity for 25 passengers, one ambulance, and several other medical facilities for the management of disaster.

The Director General of

the agency, Alhaji Salisu Makarfi, said the procurement of the helicopter was timely in view of increase in the incidence of disaster worldwide." A comprehensive disaster management has become an absolute federal government priority," he said.

As part of the federal gov-

ernment's direct contribution to complement disaster response in the country, the federal executive council had given approval to the agency to purchase two Russian MI-17-IV Helicopters for search and rescue operations and other emergency duties in the country.

55 cultists detained in Ilorin prison

At least fifty-five suspected cultists have been remanded in the Federal Prison, Ilorin. According to a report submitted to Governor Bukola Saraki by the state Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Alhaji Saka Isau, the detained cultists were arrested across the six tertiary institutions in the state.

The cases against the accused persons are at various stages of trial before the high court in the state, even as 33 of the detainees had their applications for bail turned down by the courts and ordered to be remanded in prison custody.

Consequently upon the crack-down on cultism by the state government, there has been a drastic reduction in reported cases of cult related crimes in the state.

The report disclosed that as at December 31, 2004, a total of 296 accused persons awaiting trial were in the cus-

AbdulRazaq Adebayo Correspondent (Ilorin)

tody of the Federal Prison, Ilorin, for offences ranging from armed robbery, cult membership and culpable homicide to shop breaking and theft.

Immigration reshuffles top hierarchy

Officers in charge of zonal commands and state commands of the Immigration Service have been charged to make prompt and efficient service delivery their top most priority, without compromising national security.

The Comptroller General of Immigration Service, Mr Chukwurah Joseph Udeh, gave this directive recently while effecting the reassignment of 12 assistant comptroller's general and 58 comptroller's to various zones and state commands as approved by the Honourable Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr. Iyorchia Ayu.

A statement signed by Isa Adamu on behalf of the public relations officer said some of the senior officers affected by the posting order are: Odubela-Aduroja Veronica, Asst. Comptroller General in charge of Works and Logistics has moved to the Operations Directorate. Ubi Out Patrick of ECOWAS unit, HQ now to be in charge of zone C Bauchi, Ajisafe Femi Olugbenga was redeployed to zone A, Lagos, from Admin, HQ while Umar Suleiman of zone A, Lagos, moved to zone E, Owerri. The Command and staff college, Sokoto, is now to be headed by Mr Hezekiah Leonard Daniel (ACG).

Comptroller Akolade Adebayo now takes charge of Bauchi command while Betso Fudamu Bakari is to resume duties as the comptroller, Delta State Command. Benue state command is now to be headed by Mr Idu Benedict while Wokeroro Welimati of training section, HQ is taking over the leadership of the Nigeria Immigration Training School, Orlu.

The Comptroller in charge of Sokoto State command, is now Mr Okunowo Bamidele Adelaja, and Mrs Irene Oluko has moved from Plateau State to Ebonyi State command.

A Deputy Comptroller of Immigration, Mr Sessi Patrick has replaced Chief Superintendent Isiaka Olaide Yussuf as the Service Public Relations Officer; Mr Yussuf has been re-deployed to Taraba State.

Stop N20 extortion, IGP tells police

The Acting Inspector General Of Police, Mr Sunday G. Ehindero, in Kano ordered police to stop collecting N20 from the public at various police check-points across the nation, just as he pledged prompt payments of their salaries and other entitlements.

He said that this is seriously tarnishing the image of the Nigeria Police Force. And also pointed out that by adhering to ethical order, police will be able to promote the image of the force.

According to the acting IGP "Extortion, brutality, corruption and illegal detention within the police should be things of the past."

Earlier, the Assistant In-

From Yusha'u Adamu Ibrahim Correspondent (Kano)

spector General of police in charge of zone one headquarters, Sir K. Z. Dudari, requested the sum of N7 million on monthly basis for fueling and maintenance of their vehicles in 3 commands under the zone. Giving the breakdown of the money, Dudari said that Jigawa and Katsina commands need at least N2 million each while Kano will need N3 million. He also emphasised the need for providing more equipment to the zone particularly for investigation.

He thanked the acting IGP for the visit and pledged to support and co-operate with him

Newspaper vendors protest arrest, extortion by SSS operatives

Beatrice Onuchukwu, Stringer (Onitsha)

Newspaper distributors and vendors in Onitsha, Anambra State, at the weekend embarked on peaceful demonstration over the alleged arrest, extortion and intimidation of their members by the State Security Service (SSS).

The chairman of the newspaper distributors said that it was at the early hour of Thursday that they suspected the lingering of some SSS men in various offices of the newspapers and magazines, collecting the newspapers that contained Biafran stories.

He goes further to say that at about 1pm that same day, February 10 2005, they saw ten armed men who identified themselves as SSS officials, from Awka, invaded the office of one of the their distributors, Mr Ikechukwu Obisi, and seized 400 copies of the News Magazine, including copies of Source Magazine, Rising Sun and Hallmark newspapers, arrested Obisi and two sales ladies, and took them to Awka, claiming that they were selling newspapers and magazines that contained Biafran stories.

On Friday, February 11, 2005 newspaper distributors

and vendors left all the newspapers that arrived Onitsha for distribution and went to the streets protesting the arrest of their members.

Some of the inscriptions on their placard reads, "Oga allow us to carry out our legitimate business." SSS stop intimidating, extorting and arresting our members" "when did selling of newspapers and magazines became an offence in Nigeria."

"We embarked on the demonstration because we had in the past spent over N100,000 to effect the release of our members arrested by the SSS and police over the same alleged offence of selling newspapers and magazines that carried Biafran stories, adding that "this is the third time our men were arrested and made to pay over N100,000 before they are released.

They demanded that SSS should pay the distributor N50-0,000 for the unlawful detention, and N100,000 representing loss of income engendered by the invasion or face legal action.

Federal service commission tasked on job creation

From Edet Ekanem Stringer (Uyo)

The Federal Civil Service Commission has been urged to create more vacancies for deployment of workers from state ministry to federal civil service. The Akwa Ibom State Governor, Obong Victor Attah who made the call when he received the Chairman of the Federal Civil Service Commission, Ambassador Ahmed Al-Gazali in Uyo,

said the state is uncomfortable with the low number of indigenes of the state currently working with the Federal Civil Service Commission.

Obong Attah said for the commission to achieve success in that direction, it should equally sensitise state civil servants on the need for them to willingly transfer service or to take up fresh appointment with the federal civil service.

Obong Attah who directed the challenge to the Akwa Ibom State civil servants in particular, however tasked the State Ministry Of Information and Social Orientation (as was then called) to educate the people on the need to discard their apathy towards working outside the state.

In his earlier remarks, the Chairman of the Federal Civil Service Commission, Ambassador Ahmed Al-Gazali, informed the state governor that the number of Akwa Ibom State indigenes who are directors in the federal civil service since he assumed duty has risen from three to six.

Ambassador Al-Gazali also commended the state Governor, Obong Victor Attah, for his good leadership qualities and enjoined the governor not to relent in efficient delivery of service to the people, because according to him, in public service, sometimes the best is not good enough."

He also expressed satisfaction with the representative in the Federal Civil Service Commission, Obong Aniefiok Uwah, and called on others to emulate his good example.

NEWS



Chairman, Sabon Gari local government of Kaduna state, Alhaji Bashir Ibrahim Sakadadi (right), receiving the NIDEPMA special award as the best performer during the award ceremony held at the International Conference Centre, Abuja ... recently
Pix: Joe Oroye

Obasanjo wants more women in elective offices

President Olusegun Obasanjo has said that there was nothing wrong in political parties in the country setting aside 25 per cent of their elective offices for women. Speaking at a commemorative lecture and conference on the late head of state, Gen Murtala Mohammed, yesterday in Abuja, Obasanjo said that the allocation should be made with a proviso that the parties must also campaign hard for the victory of the female candidates. He said that since 1999, he had been making efforts to get his party, the PDP to entrench a provision in its constitution allowing for at least 15 per cent allocation of offices to women. He said that although he still has not been able to achieve that, he would continue to

press and fight for the rights of women in the country. Obasanjo, who said that "the odds against women in Africa are high," charged women to come together and use the powers that they have to change things in their favour. "You must use your powers constructively and collectively to effect positive changes because the change that you desire will not come easy," he stressed. He said that success would not come the way of women through "conquest" as the guest speaker, Mrs Graca Machel-Mandela said, noting that success would only come through persuasion and moving the men along the path of change. He stressed the need for a change of attitude on the part of men and for a reorientation of men in favour of women.

Hajj: Kabo rejects failure allegation

Kabo Air Limited, one of the official carriers for Nigerian pilgrims to this year's Hajj, has refuted allegations that its operation to convey Nigerian pilgrims back from the Holy land had run into a hitch.

The Executive Director, Operations, Alhaji Aminu who disclosed this, said the airliner had so far returned over 39,000 pilgrims out of the 51,675 it transported to Saudi Arabia for the annual Islamic pilgrimage.

He also announced that the airliner had made 85 flights from the Holy land with Nigerian pilgrims out of the 106 flights it made to ferry the pilgrims to Mecca. Alhaji Aminu said only 21 flights remained for the airliner to complete its return flight for Nigerian pilgrims, adding that it would have no problem before the February 17, 2005 deadline fixed for repatriating all pilgrims from the Holy land.

The executive director assured that the remaining 12,500 pilgrims would be flown back before the expiration of the deadline, saying the major problems in returning the pilgrims was from the pilgrims themselves who were not following the laid down rules for their return journey.

He noted that Kabo Air has not had any hitch in its airlift operations since the beginning of the Hajj operation, adding that those attributing hitch to the airline were ignorant of the role of airliner in Hajj operation.

Alhaji Aminu advised returning pilgrims in the Holy land to be patient and abide by the rules and instructions of the carriers to achieve successful return to Nigerian

Dariye: Court begins hearing on abduction case

An Upper Area Court in Jos has commenced hearing in the case between the Plateau State Governor, Joshua Dariye, Mr. Chris Giwa, and the director, League for Human Rights, over assault and attempted abduction of the latter, even as the former said an out-of-court settlement was being explored.

The Counsel to Mr. Giwa, Barrister Oba Madiabuchi, told the court before hearing began that he was surprised that the case was still going on when an out-of-court settlement was being worked

From Rakiya A. Muhammad, Correspondent

But the prosecutor in the case, Sergeant Augustine Ayeniran, told the court that he was not aware of any move towards out-of-court settlement.

The judge, Alhaji Mahmood Zololo, then ruled that hearing in the case should commence with the

prosecutor presenting three witnesses.

The first prosecuting witness, Mr. Nankin Bagudu, who is the Director of the League for Human Rights, told the court how on December 4, last year, he was attacked twice, close to his office.

According to him, the first attack was carried out by one Nimyel and four other persons, while the second

one was by three other persons under the supervision of Mr. Giwa, a Special Assistant to Governor Dariye.

On the first attack, Mr. Bagudu explained that he was accosted by Nimyel and his group in front of his office at Tafawa Balewa street in Jos. "They slapped me and tried to push me into a waiting vehicle."

He however said that he

put up resistance before passers-by as well as neighbours waded into the situation.

The director of League for Human Rights said that Nimyel later confessed that he was sent to bring him (Bagudu) because of his stance against some actions of the state governor.

He added that Nimyel was forced to publicly apologise to him.

Daura LG earmarks N58m for market discongestion

In view of the problem of traffic congestion experienced at the Daura central market/motor park, the Daura local government council has earmarked fifty-eight million naira to relocate the market as well as construction of new central motor park in the area.

Disclosing this in a chat with *Daily Trust* in his office, the Chairman of the council, Engineer Abba Mato, said the measure was aimed at decentralising the two projects for the purpose of enhancing the revenue generation drive of the local government.

In his words: "The construction of the new market at the already demarcated site will cost about N50 million, while that of the motor park will cost about N8 million. The old market is to be converted to an ultra-modern shopping complex to increase what he called, 'the inadequate internally generated revenue of about N150-200,000 month-ly'."

In a related development, the council has expended another N18 million for the drilling of boreholes and provision of solar pumps, and about twenty other development projects within the local government areas in the state.

The Chairman, Engr.

From Lawal Ibrahim, Correspondent (Katsina)

Abba Mato, disclosed that the problem that bedevilled the people in the area was the problem of acute water

shortage which the council has overtime been calling on the authorities to come to the rescue of the people.

He stressed that Daura needed stable power

ID Card: Adamawa state cards ready — DNCR

As the distribution of the national ID card commences in Benue state today, the production of the cards for Adamawa state has been completed. Malam Shu'aibu Birni, Director of Department of National Civil Registration (DNCR) made the disclosure in a telephone interview with the News agency of Nigeria (NAN) today in Abuja. Birni said that production for

the two states was completed last week.

He said that the Ministry of Internal Affairs however decided to commence the distribution in Benue state today.

According to him, the distribution in Adamawa state would commence soon.

NAN reports that the ID cards have so far been distributed to residents of the FCT, Bayelsa, Yobe and Ogun states.

The distribution in Benue which is commencing today, will bring the number of states so far covered, to six.

The distribution started on April 19, 2004 in Abuja.

The director had already promised the nation that before the end of the year all the states in the federation will be covered.

NAN reports that the mass registration of Nigerians for the ID Card was carried out between February 18 and March 17, 2003.

A total of 52,053,780 Nigerians who were 18 years and above were involved



Dr. Iyorcha Ayu

Ibori appeals court verdict

By Kemi Ogedengbe
Judicial Editor

The Delta State Governor, Chief James Onanefe Ibori, has appealed the judgment of an Abuja High Court which exonerated him of the ex-convict allegation.

In a cross-appeal filed in Abuja, the appellant asked the Court of Appeal to set aside certain aspects of the lower court's judgment.

An Abuja High Court had ruled that the governor was not sufficiently identified as the James Onanefe Ibori convicted by a Bwari Upper Area Court on September 28, 1995.

Despite being victorious at the lower court, Ibori stated that he was also dissatisfied with the refusal of the trial judge to consider section 225 of the Evidence Act as applicable to the proceedings before him.

The governor, who is now the cross appellant in the suit, said he desired the police report of February 14, 2003 as a relevant exhibit. He however wanted the Court of Appeal to over rule the High Court's decision which considered the police final report dated June 7, 2003.

Two members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Dr. Godnews Agbi, and Anthony Alabi, who instituted the original suit against the governor, had however appealed against the judgment of the lower court. The case has been filed for hearing in March.

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Congratulations



His Royal Highness,
ALHAJI (DR.) SHEHU IDRIS,
Emir of Zazzau,

I, on behalf of my family, heartily rejoice with His Royal Highness, the Emir of Zazzau, ALHAJI (DR.) SHEHU IDRIS on the occasion of his 30 years on throne.

May Allah continue to guide and crown all your efforts in promoting unity and peace in the emirate, Kaduna State and the nation with resounding success.

SIGNED

HON. MOHAMMED MUSA AZI
Minister of State for Transport



HON. MOHAMMED MUSA AZI
Minister of State for Transport

Inside Politics

Senate's questionable opposition to confab

The Senate has a tradition of lethargy in taking a position on national issues. Though it continues to retain the appellation of 'the upper chamber', the Senate mostly lags behind its junior partner, the House of Representatives. Usually, perhaps against what should obtain, the Senate takes a decision only after the House has done that, especially on controversial issues of national importance. In addition, when these resolutions come, they exhibit such vagueness that flouting them becomes easy.

Critics attribute this tardiness to the obvious sympathy the Senate has for the executive. Decisions either way on such matters as fuel price increase, asylum for renegade heads of state, giving out loans to some countries, arbitrary budget cuts, non-implementation of Appropriation Acts, etc will certainly pitch the chamber against either the public or the presidency. Such issues are therefore relegated until the lower chamber decided. The Senate most often than not, if it decides at all, concurs with the House. On many matters, however, it resorts to aloofness.

On the proposed national political reforms conference, the upper chamber, as usual, chose not to disappoint its critics. While the issue has been on the table since December last year, no word came from the Senate till last week, six days after the lower chamber had taken a position, and exactly a week to the proposed date for the confab kick off.

The House resolved to reject President Olusegun Obasanjo's request for N932 million to fund the conference. It also wrote the president a letter communicating the verdict.

Though the lower chamber's position may not be free from loopholes, the Senate resolution when it finally came was not devoid of prevarication.

On Tuesday, February 8, after deliberating some items on the order paper, the Senate went into a session behind closed doors. For almost three hours the chamber was locked to journalists and the public. After what seemed like an eternity, chairman of the committee on information, Senator Tawar Wada announced the position of the Senate thus: "After a very articulate deliberation of the whole issue, the Senate came with a resolution that as far as we are concerned, there is nothing that'll stop Mr.

By Habeeb Idris Pindiga,
Political Reporter

President from convening a conference of eminent Nigerians and what have you. He is free as the number one citizen of this country, as the head of the executive to gather people and gather opinions on how properly to run this government. Basically there's nothing wrong about this.

But if in the day to day running of the government, Mr. President thinks it's going to ameliorate security risk or anything; that he will want to use security money to do that conference, well and good, it's for him. But basically if runs counter to the tenets of the 2005 budget, definitely he will receive a query for that.

"The only thing I want to add here is that it may be premature to be categorical in

things are necessary," and it was expedient to stop use of public funds on unnecessary events. But if the president is "free" to hold the conference, is he not also free to be given public money to do it since it is not going to be a personal activity?

Wada talked of the possibility of the budget providing clauses against the conference. But the report of

president. The question here is, did the senate deliberately choose to take a nebulous position to give a leeway for the confab?

Although the chairman did not say exactly how the Senate arrived at its decision, *Daily Trust* learnt that during the executive session, senators hinged their opposition to the confab on possible suspicious motives in the project, presence of

session? Besides this, should a policy be halted on the grounds of wasteful tendencies? After all how many projects in the budget can stand the test of prudence? Also, since the resolutions of the conference would eventually come before the legislature in form of bills, where then lies the alleged usurpation of powers of the lawmakers?

Besides the charges of selfishness against them, there are speculations now going round that the Senate might have acted on yet another script form Aso Rock by opting out of the confab. It is being rumoured that the president himself is not keen on convening the conference and therefore welcomes the heat from the National Assembly so that in the end he may easily shelve the it on the grounds that there is no money for it.

But with a president who has not been famous for buckling to popular demand, this assertion may be faulty. If he doesn't want to hold the conference he would not start the process in the first place. But should he be interested, extra-budgetary expenditure is not a new concept to him. The 2003 All Africa Games (COJA) and The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) are few examples here.

Perhaps the Senate should have been more explicit in deciding on the conference. If senators find it legal with nothing wrong about it, then they should go ahead and appropriate funds for it, since Obasanjo cannot finance the confab from the proceeds of his Otta farm. But if they have questions against its legality, they should, as usual, emulate their colleagues in the House and go to



Senate President, Adolphus Wabara

"But considering the constitutional and legislative duties of the Senate, the Senate resolves that basically it has nothing to do with the conference. It's not associating itself with the conference and that being the case, the Senate also finds it unnecessary to appropriate money specifically to fund this conference. That's basically the decision of the Senate and the Senate will stand by that decision."

Reminded that the president may decide to use security or contingency votes to finance the conference, Wada said: "the security vote and contingency vote, if Mr. President uses this to ameliorate any security threat, I think if the National Assembly queries it, it may be a futile query. If also the funds are used on things that are contingent to the administration of the country, basically the query will be a futile query. The Senate does not see any wisdom in appropriating money for a conference of that nature, and that's why it's not doing that.

that respect, because the Appropriation bill has not been passed into law, so we won't know the ramifications of the budget. There may be some specific clauses prohibiting Mr. President from even using security funds to fund the conference. There may be some specific clauses prohibiting Mr. President from using even contingency fund for that thing. If that one happens, then definitely the National assembly will live up to expectation and query Mr. President on that."

Many questions arose from this position of the Senate. In one breath the Senate said the president was free to hold the conference, but in that same breath it said it wouldn't appropriate funds for the gathering. Again, the Senate said there was nothing wrong with the conference but added that it was unnecessary. Why would the legislative House refuse to provide funds for a project it declares legal? Is the Senate not by this abdicating its responsibility? Wada responded thus: "Not all legal



President Olusegun Obasanjo

the Senate committee on finance and appropriation, due for consideration this week, does not entail any such provision. So unless the Senate in session inserts these clauses, which is unlikely given the tradition of wholesale approval to budget

various reports (e.g. Vision 2010, etc) that are still to be implemented and the envisaged waste in holding this gathering. They also contended that allowing the conference to hold would amount to passing a vote of no confidence on the

Many questions arose from this position of the Senate. In one breath the Senate said the president was free to hold the conference, but in that same breath it said it wouldn't appropriate funds for the gathering. Again, the Senate said there was nothing wrong with the conference but added that it was unnecessary. Why would the legislative House refuse to provide funds for a project it declares legal? Is the Senate not by this abdicating its responsibility? Wada responded thus: "Not all legal things are necessary," and it was expedient to stop use of public funds on unnecessary events. But if the president is "free" to hold the conference, is he not also free to be given public money to do it since it is not going to be a personal activity?

reports, the Appropriation Act will give room for the president to manoeuvre. If this happens, then the legislature would have no means of 'querying' the

National assembly. But can mere suspicion be enough reasons to stop a government programme? Should the Senate's chosen paranoia be allowed to abort the jaw-jaw

court. A court pronouncement in their favour is what will give them enough fangs to bite if the president eventually goes ahead with the conference.

Inside Politics

Confab 'll complement the constitution – A.T. Ahmed

Senator A.T. Ahmed is a member of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Board of Trustees and frontline politician from Kogi Central Senatorial District. He comments in this interview with Hammeed M. Bello, Senior Political Reporter, on why the conference should hold; the vacancy in the PDP national chairmanship position and his chances on Kogi politics and more.

Excerpts:-

The federal government is perfecting plans to hold a national dialogue on political reforms middle of this month. But the conference has received criticism from the parliament and stakeholders in the democratic process. As a PDP Board of Trustees' member, what is your assessment or views on the conference?

The idea of holding conference, sovereign or otherwise, started about three to four years ago. And it has always been the view that some kind of dialogue can go on without necessarily making it sovereign. And I am happy that the presidency has decided to allow it to go on, and I believe that it should go on. It is like any other kind of body advising the government: the executive, legislature and even the judiciary. So I don't see anything wrong with the conference. It is an avenue for everybody to air their views about what is happening in the country. There are issues that have been overlooked at the constitution or by even the present government and there are people outside that can even come together and discuss those issues as long as these issue are eventually taken to the National Assembly for consideration and approval; hence, there is absolutely nothing wrong with the national dialogue.

As a former Senator, your colleagues in the present Senate have just rejected the conference and approval of budget for the conference. Do you share the views of the Senate?

As far as I am concerned, they should view it as another body that is looking at the Nigerian problems in different angles, and they shouldn't reject advice; they should have an opportunity to look at whatever recommendations that are being made as a result of this dialogue for them to deliberate on. As far as the budgeting is concerned, I don't think there is any

amount that is spent on improving the governance of Nigeria that is too much. After all, without political stability and security, there can never be development, so I believe that the National Assembly should look at this idea of the budget for the dialogue again and, to me, they should approve it.

The lawmakers raised the issue of constitutionality. They cited section 4 of the constitution as empowering the National Assembly as the only law making institution in the Federal Republic of Nigeria; and that the setting up of the confab is like usurping the powers of the National Assembly, or setting up a parallel parliament which they say is unconstitutional. On that basis, they dissociated themselves from it. What is your assessment of these issues of constitutionality?

No. I don't think it is against the constitution. The constitution has never said that you cannot raise a body or a committee or group of bodies to advise the government. Yes, it could be necessary to bring that body or that committee or that conference for an approval of the National Assembly; it may be necessary that everything said by the conference is advisory; and nothing is definite yet. So, it has not come against the constitution; it is when it is sovereign. That's why most of us will oppose the idea of using the word 'sovereign'.

Now as it is, it is purely an advisory body that is going to sit down, look at the Nigeria problems, and make recommendations, which are subject to discussion at the National Assembly level.

The views expressed in public are that name, not withstanding, whether sovereign or not, you can only set up a body to dialogue on national issues, but you can never control the tempo. Those issues that advocate sovereign conference will certainly be raised at the conference and the president cannot control it?

The idea is not to gag anybody from talking at all. Nobody can control the press; you can talk as much as you like. Anybody is free in a democracy to say anything they like as long as it is not made into law, and the only body that can enact it to law is the National Assembly.

It has been rumoured that you are one of those eyeing the PDP chairmanship, or one of those being considered to succeed Audu Ogbah until 2007, because you are from Kogi State, and the slot has been zoned to north central till 2007. What difficulties do you expect in achieving the position?

It is true that the chairman of the party has resigned, and the position has been zoned to the north central. Anybody in the north central can occupy that position. If I am



Senator A. T. Ahmed

being considered for that position, I don't see anything wrong with it. Of course those who have pronounced my name as one of the candidates must have known why they are doing that because, first of all, the position has been vacant and naturally Kogi and Kwara and perhaps Nasarawa and Niger states should occupy that position, since Benue and Plateau states had previously occupied that position. So, if I am being considered, I am not surprised. It is true I am a member of the board of trustees and that is the highest policy body of the party, and I am a foundation member of the PDP. I have been in politics for about 15 to 16 years, so maybe some people feel I have sufficient experience to manage a party.

Given the opportunity, what will be your major focus in turning the PDP around, especially that it has witnessed some crises recently?

Well, discipline, constitutionality, party focus, right advice and right decisions are what it requires as far as I am concerned. I have been a public servant for several years, and I know the danger in not following set down rules and regulations. My major focus will be discipline and the stability of the party as well as following the constitution of the party and party guidelines.

Presently, the PDP Reforms Committee, headed by Alhaji Iron Dan Musa, is working. What area do you consider as requiring urgent reforms to properly place the party ahead of 2007?

Well, everybody, every politician knows that the most controversial aspect of politicking is the electoral process. And there is no doubt that this is a major issue in the party, and is the root of almost every indiscipline and lawlessness, and whatever you call it that has occurred in the party. So the reform on electoral process should be a priority.

There has also been the clamour for zoning or rotation of the presidency for consideration by the PDP Reform Committee. While some of the PDP members support rotation, others are

against it and the argument has been raging. What is your view?

I think in Nigeria where there are over 300 ethnic groups, some form of political formula should emerge to take care of the majority of these ethnic groups. I believe that the best thing that has happened is zoning the country into six, and the next thing to do is to make sure that all these six zones share powers equally; and the only way you can rotate these powers is to divide the powers into six and make sure that they rotate round the country. If this is done at the federal level, it should also be done at the state level. And I am happy to say that in most cases, this power rotation is done even at the local government level.

You are from Kogi State. What aspect of the state politics gives you cause for concern?

Kogi is like a mini Nigeria. It is resting on three political legs, which happen to coincide with the three senatorial districts, and of course, it would have been an easy state to run if whoever is at the helm of affairs realises the true situation and tries to rule and share powers accordingly. Honestly, I believe that Kogi State is one of the most viable states in the country. All it needs is good governance and good understanding among all the ethnic groups. If the three ethnic groups in the state come together and think together, and share powers and positions together accordingly, there will be no problem.

What is your assessment of your governor in terms of performance? Would you say he has done well?

Well, the governor is doing his best. I believe there are still rooms for improvement.

2007 is drawing nearer and the fight and scheming for the number one position is getting hotter by the day, and camps seem to be emerging in the PDP which is feared to adversely affect the party's prospects. Do you fear that such in-house struggles have the potential to threaten the party's cohesion?

No. I don't think so. I think the PDP is stable. And I believe there are insufficient experienced politicians within the PDP that will keep the political tempo down. I believe that the PDP will still remain as the strongest party in the country.

“There are issues that have been overlooked at the constitution or by even the present government and there are people outside that can even come together and discuss those issues as long as these issue are eventually taken to the National Assembly for consideration and approval; hence, there is absolutely nothing wrong with the national dialogue.”



BENUE STATE

SECRETARY TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT

Congratulations on your Well Deserved Honour

The Secretary to the State Government, Dr. John Orokpo mni, the Permanent Secretary (General Services) Mr. S. S. Gbinde mni, the Permanent Secretary (Political), Mr. D. Enegele, the Permanent Secretary (REPA) Mr. J. O. Oko, Management and entire staff of the Cabinet Secretariat join millions of other Benue sons and daughters and other well-wishers beyond, in celebrating with our Executive Governor Mr. George Akume, on the occasion of the conferment on him of a Doctorate Degree by the University of Jos.

The award, which is from a notable academic institution, is a further demonstration of the dynamic, purposeful and result-oriented qualities, which have endeared you, our Governor, to the people within and outside the state.

While praying to God to give you the ennoblements to face the challenges of your present position, we pledge our unflinching support to your administration in its determination to make life more meaningful to the generality of our people.

Congratulations!

Signed

Dr. J. R. Orokpo
Secretary to the State Government.



Gov. Akume



Dr. Orokpo

SPORTS

Yoga helps Giggs bear pain

Manchester United's Ryan Giggs has revealed the secret of his longevity - yoga.

The Wales winger, who just missed out on a 50th international cap when he had to pull out of the 2-0 win against Hungary last week because of injury,

believes his impressive Old Trafford season has been helped by the eastern art.

"I feel as fit as I've ever been and generally I have managed to get over the problems that I've had with my hamstring over the years," Giggs told the Wales on Sunday newspaper.

"A lot of it is down to being more experienced and knowing the injury better as I've got older.

"I rest now when I feel that I need a rest and the manager (Alex Ferguson) has been great in that respect.

"The other thing is that I've been doing yoga now for two years, which has definitely helped me with my hamstrings and back.

"A few of us older players do it at the club with a yoga teacher. It's just about stretching and getting myself in the right positions to strengthen my back and hamstrings. It's been great for me and I don't think it's a coincidence that I haven't really had any big problems in that area over that time."



Another form of Yoga? Manchester United's winger Ryan Giggs attributed his impressive form this season to the eastern art.

UEFA chief, Johansson, quits as AIK chairman

UEFA president Lennart Johansson has quit as chairman of Swedish side AIK along with the entire board following the club's relegation.

"There are various interest groups within AIK which have been dissatisfied with our results, both sporting and financial. There is no other solution to this problem than to resign," Johansson told newspaper Dagens Nyheter.

"We are taking responsibility for failure."

The nine-man board took

the decision to go after a meeting on Sunday. The club was relegated in November.

AIK has been in decline in recent years. The team won the last of their 10 league championships in 1998.

Johansson said one of the reasons for the club's problems was that he could not devote enough time to the job.

"I warned right from the start that I travel a lot, but it was anyway wrong of me to accept this commission on the board."

United hopeful of Ruud return

Ruud van Nistelrooy is set to return for Manchester United in Saturday's FA Cup tie away to Everton provided he gets through training unscathed this week.

The 28-year-old Dutch striker has been out of action for nearly three months because of an Achilles injury.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson had looked to the Champions League game against AC Milan on February 23 as the match where the former PSV Eindhoven forward would make his comeback, making it clear he had no doubts about the goalscorer's ability to be on top form despite the absence of a warm-up game.

But now he could be on the bench for this weekend's game at Goodison Park. "Ruud comes back tomorrow (Tuesday) and we need to assess how far on he is," said Ferguson. "The training he has been doing in Holland has been perfect and I am very satisfied with it."

"There is a chance he could be involved against Everton but we will just have to see how he comes through training."

Even without van Nistelrooy, United made it 13 wins in 15 league games with a 2-0 derby victory over Manchester City at Eastlands on Sunday.

Wayne Rooney's 13th goal of the season and a Richard Dunne own-goal secured a United victory which left Ferguson's second-placed side nine points behind leaders Arsenal.

But the veteran Scottish boss insisted: "I am still hopeful. We have to be. It can happen out of nothing. They may lose a game at home when no-one expects

them to. You never know."

City manager Kevin Keegan, whose side managed an impressive goalless draw away to Chelsea last weekend, thought it unlikely any team could stop the Londoners ending their 50-year wait for a top-flight title.

But the former England boss knows only too well that a slip-up could still happen, having been in charge of the Newcastle side that blew a 12-point lead to hand United the title nine years ago.

"On current form, I don't think the title race is over," Keegan said. "Manchester United have to keep going like they have over the past 15 games."

"You know they can do that, I have seen it before at first-hand, but you think Chelsea could keep going as well."

"Chelsea still have to play Arsenal and Manchester United yet, so it is obviously possible," the former Liverpool and England striker added. "But even if Chelsea lose three, is it really possible for Manchester United to win every game until the end of the season?"

Robinho upstages Tevez as Santos thump Corinthians

Santos forward Robinho scored twice and set up the other goal as his side thumped big-spending Corinthians 3-0 in the Paulista championship on Sunday.

The match had been billed as a personal battle between Robinho and Argentina forward Carlos Tevez, signed by Corinthians for a South American record fee of \$18 million in December.

The two 21-year-olds are regarded as two of South America's most exciting players.

Leaders Sao Paulo beat Atletico Sorocaba 4-1, while Palmeiras substitute Diego Souza was replaced after only six minutes during a 2-2 draw at Uniao Sao Joao and left the field insulting his coach Estevam Soares.

Corinthians had not lost a game with Tevez in the side but were quickly in trouble at the Vila Belmiro.

Robinho threaded the ball between two defenders to full-back Leo, who toe-poked the ball through Fabio Costa's legs after seven minutes.

Tevez set up what should have been an equaliser for Gil, who instead shot straight at goalkeeper Mauro, and then saw his own shot saved by Mauro's legs.

Robinho settled the game with two goals in 10 minutes early in the second half.

He latched on to Deivid's pass and placed the ball beyond goalkeeper Fabio Costa, then dispossessed a defender and fired home the third.

The match was marred when Mauro was hit by a stone thrown

by Corinthians supporters behind one of the goals and play was held up for five minutes. He continued after treatment.

Brazilian champions Santos have 17 points from five games in the Paulista, one of the regional competitions which serve as a prelude to the national championship.

Sao Paulo striker Grafite scored a hat-trick as his side stayed two points clear. Josue scored the fourth.

Palmeiras fell to fifth after the draw with Uniao Sao Joao in which the main talking point was Souza's substitution.

The player gesticulated wildly at coach Estevam Soares as he left the pitch, then publicly insulted him on live television. Soares told reporters the move was tactical.

The upsets continued in Rio de Janeiro, where two of the minor clubs reached the final of the Carioca championship's first stage.

Americano removed Botafogo, the last remaining so-called big club, by winning 2-1 in the first half of a double bill at the Maracana in front of a 70,000 crowd.

Veteran striker Tulio, scorer of the notorious Hand of God goal against Argentina at the 1995 Copa America, was on target as Volta Redonda beat Cabofriense 2-0 in the subsequent match.

Milan keep Juve within their sights

Serie A title-holders AC Milan stayed in close pursuit of leaders Juventus with a 1-0 win away to Reggina.

The only goal of the game was scored in comical fashion by Reggina's Marco Zamboni, who put through his own net six minutes from half time when trying to make a clearance from his own penalty box.

The 27-year-old defender sliced the ball which spun backwards and looped over the head of Reggina keeper Nicola Pavarini.

The visitors dominated the second half and always looked dangerous on the break, but poor finishing prevented them from killing the game off sooner.

Milan's third consecutive league victory enabled them to cut Juventus' advantage at the top of the table to two points.

Juve threw down the gauntlet to their title rivals earlier in the day with a 2-1 home win over Udinese which, for a few hours at least, extended their lead over

the reigning champions to five points.

Milan defender Alessandro Nesta admitted his team were gifted the goal but insisted they fully deserved the three points in Calabria.

"The goal was very fortunate, but after that we created lots of chances on the counter-attack and should have won by more," said the Italy international.

In Turin, Zlatan Ibrahimovic opened the scoring for Juve in the first minute with a cool finish before Mauro Camoranesi found the top corner of the net with a rising drive shortly after half-time. Davide Di Michele scored for Udinese in stoppage time.

Juve's victory provided the perfect tonic after two successive defeats that saw their eight-point lead slashed.

Defeat left Udinese in fourth place, behind Inter Milan who beat Roma on Saturday.

Juve coach Fabio Capello was delighted to see his new attacking formation pay off.

"We did something different with three defenders and three strikers and I don't think Udinese were expecting that - it took them by surprise," he said.

Fiorentina improved their chances of avoiding the drop with a 2-1 home win over fellow strugglers Parma, while Brescia also gave themselves hope of retaining their top flight status by defeating Cagliari 2-0.

Sampdoria remain fifth despite losing 1-0 at Livorno where Cristiano Lucarelli grabbed the winner eight minutes from time.

Palermo are sixth after their

1-1 draw at Bologna, while Lecce thumped Chievo 3-0. Siena remain in danger of relegation after being held to a 2-2 draw at home to Messina.

Inter Milan, whose title challenge has been hampered by 15 draws, maintained their unbeaten record after beating Roma 2-0 at the San Siro.

Serbian dead-ball specialist Sinisa Mihajlovic, who played for Roma between 1992 and 1994, scored both goals from left-footed free-kicks.

In Saturday's other match, Lazio eased their relegation fears with a 2-1 home win over bottom club Atalanta.

Luxemburgo record seventh straight win

Michael Owen and Ivan Helguera scored three minutes apart late in the second half and Real Madrid rallied past Osasuna 2-1 on Sunday to give coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo a record seventh straight victory since taking over the club.

The victory on a wind-swept field kept Madrid four points behind Spanish league leader FC

Barcelona and enabled Luxemburgo, who was appointed coach in December, to break Luis Carniglia's record for a first-year manager set in the 1958-59 season.

FC Barcelona, which won 4-1 at Zaragoza on Saturday, leads the standings with 54 points. Sevilla, which moved into third with a 2-1 victory over Villarreal earlier in the day, has 41.



Robinho

Sports



Former world number one, Kim Clijsters makes her comeback in Antwerp this week

Clijsters launches comeback in Antwerp

Former world number one Kim Clijsters makes her comeback from a serious wrist injury at the Antwerp Diamond Games this week. Clijsters last played in early October when she retired in the second set of a match against Russia's Elena Bovina. That tournament in Belgium had been her first for five months.

"I don't expect great things, I am just happy to be able to play again," Clijsters told reporters at the weekend. "I have practised several times on centre court to try and find my touch slowly. "I have been training

normally since January 4. I'm still stiff around my wrist but it's not painful any more."

Clijsters, 21, will play Croatia's Jelena Kostanic in the first round of the \$585,000 Antwerp tournament on Tuesday (1630 GMT), her first on-court appearance since splitting from fiance Lleyton Hewitt.

The Belgian was a victim of her own success in 2003 she was the first women's player to contest more than 100 singles matches since Chris Evert in 1974.

She reached the Australian Open final in January/February 2004 before suffering wrist injuries which led to

her pulling out midway through a tournament in Berlin in May.

Clijsters had surgery to remove a cyst on her left wrist she is right-handed but has a two-handed backhand in June and had an abortive comeback in early October.

Later that month she and Hewitt announced their four-year romance was over, just five weeks after stating their intention to marry in Australia this month.

Australian Hewitt has since proposed to soap opera actress Bec Cartwright.

"Lots of things happened this winter but there's no point in talking about them," Clijsters said at the weekend.

Bryant returns but Lakers fall to Cavaliers

Zydrunas Ilgauskas picked up 30 points and LeBron James added 25 points, nine assists and eight rebounds to help the Cleveland Cavaliers pound the Los Angeles Lakers 103-89 Sunday.

Kobe Bryant scored a Lakers-best 26 points on his

Cavaliers

return after missing 14 games with a badly sprained right ankle.

The All-Star guard was booed by the crowd at Cleveland's Gund Arena and missed his opening shot.

Overall, he showed few signs of rust after being on the sidelines for more than a month.

"It feels great to be back," said Bryant after the Lakers lost for the fifth time in six games.

James produced his best work for Cleveland in the second half with 21 points.

In Miami, Dwyane Wade poured in 28 points and Shaquille O'Neal 27 as the Heat defeated the San Antonio Spurs 96-92 in a showdown between the Eastern and Western conference leaders.

Wade and O'Neal outplayed Tim Duncan and the Spurs back court of Tony Parker and Manu Ginobili to claim their first win over San Antonio in three years.

Ginobili had 24 points for the Spurs while Parker hit for 22 and Duncan 20.

In Minneapolis, Ben Gordon had 21 points as the Chicago Bulls edged the Minnesota Timberwolves 87-83 to ruin Kevin McHale's debut as coach.

Taking over from Flip Saunders after he was fired Saturday, McHale failed to inspire the Timberwolves as they were beaten for the eighth time in nine games.

Thorpe to miss world championships

Ian Thorpe will skip this year's world swimming championships in Montreal in an attempt to peak for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, his coach Tracey Menzies said on Monday.

Menzies said in an interview broadcast on Australian television that Thorpe wanted to take a year off competition to avoid burn-out.

"This year, 2005, Ian won't be standing up to race at world titles," Menzies said.

"(It's) going to be hard for the Australian team and hard for his team mates but

it's something he needs to do in preparation for Beijing."

Thorpe, 22, has been in the Australian senior team since he was 14 but took a long break after last year's Athens Olympics where he won four medals, including gold in the 200 and 400 metres freestyle.

He has returned to light training but is well below peak fitness. The Australia trials are scheduled for next month.

Thorpe has won 11 gold medals at the world championships, more than any other swimmer in history.

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The General public is hereby informed that the Original Land Document belonging to **Mallam Yakubu Suleiman** has been declared missing. With Certificate of Occupancy No. NE/397 BS/MOW/LAN/672 House No. 9B Adamu Jumba Road G.R.A. Bauchi. Whoever transacts business with the said documents does that at his/her own risk.

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Signed
SHEHU UMARDANYAYA

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This is to inform the general public, especially the Ministry of Federal Capital Territory of the original letter of allocation with ref. No. MFCT/LA/AN.49 dated 21/12/01 in respect of Plot No. MD.599 situated Guzape District, Abuja measuring 1,600 square metres issued to **Joseph C. Okoli** of No. 27 River Lane, G.R.A. Enugu.

All efforts to locate the document, which was discovered missing on 4th January 2005 proved unsuccessful. If found, please return to **Engr. Joseph C. Okoli** of the above address or the nearest Police Station.

SIGNED: **Joseph C. Okoli**

Change of Names

I, formerly **INIEUNDUEBI TERRY GBARANBIRI**, now **BINALAYEFA PETERS GBARANBIRI**. All former documents remain valid. Rivers State University of Science and Technology, P/Harcourt and general public please note.

I, formerly known as **MISS OYEM UCHECHUKWU STELLA**, now wish to be addressed as **MRS. OSIKE UCHECHUKWU STELLA**. PP TESCO M Ikeja and General public to take note.

Formerly known as **SAMSON BITRUS**, now wish to be known as **SAMSON USMAN MUSA**. Kogi State University and Queency International to note.

I, formerly **MISS OLUWAKEMI AINA ADELEKAN**, now to be called **MRS OLUWAKEMI AINA THOMAS**. All former documents remain valid. General Public to note.

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Sports

OKOCHA BLUNDER

CAF meet on NFA protest

Attempts by the NFA to put the blame for the Okocha vote scandal at the doorsteps of CAF have been furiously rejected by the continental governing body as the executive committee met yesterday in Durban ahead of tonight's awards Gala Night with the Nigeria as a major point on the agenda.

CAF spokesman Habuba Suleiman was quoted by leading Nigerian sports daily *TodaySports* as saying that the form was sent to the NFA three months ago.

"That is a lie, it is absolutely incorrect," a furious Suleiman is quoted by *TodaySports* as saying. "I personally sent the form through fax, and the machine confirmed delivery on November 27, 2004."

Suspended NFA Secretary General Taiwo Ogunjobi

had told *KICKOFF* last weekend that from the records at available, the NFA did not receive any nomination forms from CAF.

"We did not receive any such form from CAF," Ogunjobi told *KICKOFF* last Friday.

"We instructed the clerk to check all the correspondence received from 1 December and no such document was found in the record, either by fax, courier or normal post."

With Habuba's revelation, the NFA would need to go back at least a week earlier as the CAF man went on to

add that he even went a step further.

"I also went on to make confirmation through a phone call, and I spoke to a certain Bola Oyeyode and another lady. I wonder why anybody should accuse CAF of not sending the information to the NFA."

"This form was sent to all affiliates of CAF. Why should

Nigeria be left out. I personally supervised the sending of the forms, and not a single association or federation was ignored."

Habuba also said that CAF was still investigating the matter, "CAF is investigating the Nigeria claim."

Latest reports suggest that frantic NFA officials sent a nomination form to CAF on

Friday with Chukwu's name on it but no signature. This is several weeks after the CAF deadline for submission of the forms.

But CAF have stated that that nomination will not be entertained but will also be deliberated upon at the executive committee meeting with a view to getting to the root of the fraudulent practice.

Amokachi pulls crowd in Ibadan

Former Super Eagles World Cup star Daniel 'The Bull' Amokachi made his much-advertised comeback to the local league Sunday but his club Nassarawa United fell 3-1 to hosts Shooting Stars in front of an 18,000-strong crowd that packed the Lekan Salami Stadium in Ibadan to catch a glimpse of the ex-Everton and Besiktas ace.

Amokachi thrilled the Ibadan fans with deft football skills after coming on as a replacement for Friday Ekong in the 74th minute.

He made several dangerous moves which nearly resulted into goals but for the agility of 3SC captain and goalkeeper Kola Ige, Oluwole Johnson and defence marshal Seyi Ogunsanya, who made sure the former Eagles skipper was not allowed any space to do damage.

Amokachi in the 77th minute was shielded by Ige after he made incursions into the box. Also in the 79th minute his one-two pass with Jerry Dakop nearly resulted in a goal. In the 81st minute, 'The Bull' also dribbled past Johnson and Chijioke Ojiako before Chidi Orji stopped him.

But the highlight of his comeback match was when Ogunsanya thought he had successfully shielded the ball for corner only for Amokachi to cleverly control the ball on the line before he crashed a tricky shot from a difficult impossible angle. The effort was saved by Ige in the 84th minute of the match.

The 3SC were forced on the back foot in the two minutes of added time as they fought hard to ward off the incursions of the Nassarawa boys, who suddenly woke up from their slumber in the last quarter of the game following Amokachi's entrance.

Goals, red cards, crowd trouble open new season

The 2005 Nigeria Premier League season got off to a cracking start as goals, red cards, disturbances and the comeback of Daniel Amokachi dominated the headlines.

Kwara United, Lobi Stars and Shooting Stars all scored convincing victories on the opening weekend. But echoes of violence still looms as crowd trouble almost marred Gabros' home tie with Rangers in Aba.

Kadiri Ikhami may have predicted that his side would struggle in the first six weeks of the league, but looking at the score line in his opening game against Iwusanyanwu Nationale, one would be hard-pressed to believe him.

The Ilorin side went top of the log after dismissing Nationale 3-0 at the Ilorin Township Stadium on Saturday. Akona Nisikak found the net two minutes before half time. Isa Ali doubled the score on 66 minutes and Chukwuma Akubueze rounded up the goals with five minutes of time left.

A day later, Lobi followed suit, hammering El Kanemi Warriors by the same scoreline to join Kwara at the summit. Onyekachi Okoye, Udi and Chinedu Ezimora all scored for Lobi.

African champions Enyimba were held to a 1-1 draw at Niger Tomatoes, with the Minna side needing a second penalty by Aliyu Mohammed to tie the game after Prince Okomu had shot Enyimba ahead on 37 minutes.

NPA succumbed to a late goal by Hassan Abduljalili to also draw 1-1 with Kano Pillars. Former Pillars man Emmanuel Atobasi had given the Seaside a 25th minute lead as the hosts threatened to run riot but failed to take

their chances.

Shooting Stars made short work of Nasarawa complete with ex-Super Eagles skipper Daniel Amokachi, who came on for the last quarter of an hour to thunderous applause and some deft skills. Former Lobi man Ladi Gasper sandwiched a first half brace between Zubair Kazem's goal for Nasarawa.



FC Barcelona Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o celebrates after scoring for the Catalans. He is widely expected to retain the African Player of the Year crown ahead of Nigeria's Austin Okocha.

TV BLACKOUT

NFL gives MINAJ ultimatum

By Patrick Andrew, Senior Sports Reporter

MINAJ broadcasting outfit, which claims to hold the right to transmit the Premier League matches live, has been handed a week ultimatum to meet its obligation or face the wrath of the Nigeria Football League board.

MINAJ had last Saturday obtained a court injunction stopping the African Independent Television (AIT) and the NFL from transmitting the Premier League live on the grounds that it has an existing contract with the NFA on the Premier League.

Following the court order, AIT, which was on ground to transmit live the Kwara United, Nationale match, could not thus denying Nigerians, the opportunity to watch the match on television.

"They (MINAJ) say they own the broadcast right. We (NFL) did not know that they hold an existing right to transmit the matches live. Now that we know, we have given them the go-ahead to transmit the premier league matches live starting unfailingly by this Saturday,

Salihu Abubakar, the executive secretary of the NFL said yesterday.

He confirmed that the NFL had paid the AIT huge amount of money to bring the match live to the homes of Nigerians but the court injunction, which MINAJ sought and obtained, stopped all the efforts.

"Anyway, it's an easy way out for us because now that they have informed us, we expect them to put the league on air unfailingly from this Saturday.

"Our interest is to see the league transmitted live, whoever holds the right should not be an issue. We want the matches televised life every weekend. So MINAJ can go ahead to beam the matches as well as meet its obligation to us.

"You see, we don't know that they have an existing contract. Even then, we don't have the details. Now we would expect them to come forward to meet their financial obligation to us before they begin to transmit the matches this Saturday," he said

warning that failure to comply would forced the NFL to take subsequent action against MINAJ.

Trustsports recalls that MINAJ had a two-tenure contract to beam the Premier League matches live. Though it could not beam matches live in the first contract it was able to secure renewal of the contract, which terminated last November.

MINAJ was also able to transmit some matches in the 2003/2004 season but could not beam a single match in the second stanza prompting the NFA board to recommend for the termination of the contract.

The recommendation was ratified at the last annual general meeting of the football house in Port Harcourt. Before then, MINAJ, which was said to have signed a contract valued at \$650,000 but paid \$150,000, could not meet the demand for the balance.

Besides, it was to increase the value of the contract by 15 per cent in the second tenure. But neither the balance nor the new value were met before the NFA called-off the deal. This

though only after the contract tenure expired last November.

It was not, however, clear what the grudge of MINAJ is considering the fact that the contract itself had generated disdain from several quarters since the outfit, which was off-the-air for a good part of last year, could not beam the league live in the second phase of the season.

3SC coach hails Amokachi

Shooting Stars coach Godfrey Esu has showered praise on comeback star Daniel Amokachi for performing up to expectation despite Nassarawa's opening Premier League defeat in Ibadan at the weekend.

"Amokachi really played well today. If he can continue this way then he would be back to his old form soonest, and this will go a long way in helping his team," Esu told *KICKOFF*.

On his part, the former Super Eagles striker was obviously delighted to be back when he spoke to *KICKOFF* after the match:

"The bull will always be the bull. I believe I played well today, and you can attest to this fact.

"I came back home to help the league and as you know I am from the North. That was the reason I joined Nassarawa and I am ready to help the team achieve success this year."

"The league will improve and you can see that the officiating was fantastic today. 3SC are a strong team and they have a very strong player in Ladi Gasper.

If the team (3SC) continues this way the sky is the limit for them," he added.

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TUESDAY COLUMN

Tuesday, February 15, 2005

EDITORIAL

Hajj 2005: Same old story?

The same old promises of a better hajj were made by government officials in the run up to this year's Hajj. However if what happened so far is any guide, this year's operation could be one of the worst. IRS airline one of those contracted to airlift a large chunk of the over 60,000 pilgrims could not start on time because of some technical and administrative bottlenecks. Even the weather seems to have conspired against the airlift as flights were not possible for a number of days. Thousands spent up to a week or more at airports waiting to be airlifted to the Holy land.

It was even worse for hundreds of intending pilgrims mainly from Borno state who could not even get to the Holy land in spite of all the monetary and emotional investment they made in a bid to fulfill this important pillar of Islam. Thousands of Nigerian pilgrims are yet to return home. Officially we are told that the homeward operation will be completed by the 17th of this month. For the umpteenth time, Nigeria seem incapable of organising a hitch free Hajj operation even though it is far behind other countries like Indonesia in terms of the sheer number of citizens who undertake the ritual journey.

As many analysts have argued, part of the problem of Nigerian Hajj operation is the way governments at different levels see it as a means of dispensing patronage. This has given rise to a multiplicity of agencies at federal and state levels which sometime end up adding to the red tape that serves the cause of officialdom more than the pilgrims they are meant to help. It appears that as in other areas, Hajj operations could also benefit from less government involvement and more private sector participation. Government should concern itself more in the area of regulating private sector operators, providing passports and consular services for pilgrims in the Holy land. Already the government does not provide any subsidy to the pilgrims as is assumed by some.

On the other hand, private operators are also taking tentative steps in the business of Hajj. A few thousand Nigerians this year performed the pilgrimage through private operators. But as many who paid a little extra than those who went with the government Pilgrims Welfare Board to go with the private operators will testify, theirs was not as smooth as many had hoped. There were delays at airports and dissatisfaction with accommodation arrangements in addition to poor communication. However, many will agree that as more businessmen get into the Hajj operations, there will be competition which could provide a viable alternative to the dominance of government of this important sector.

What remains important for whoever is organising such huge human movements like the Hajj, planning is of essence. Last minute approach to the hajj operation is a sure recipe for chaos. Planning for the next hajj begins as the current one is being completed. On their part, those undertaking this journey of a lifetime should also do their bit by turning up at airports or hajj camp only when it is their turn to do so. Where unforeseen situations arise, reliable information helps to reduce rumours and heresy. At all times, it is important to preserve human dignity by not allowing pilgrims to be at the mercy of the elements while the problems are being sorted out. For the moment while government remains the dominant player in this business, Amirul hajj and other related officials should be made to be the last to leave for the Holy land and to return. This will help ensure that they work to see that ordinary pilgrims are airlifted on schedule and their welfare is not compromised by officials who disappear when they are most needed.

Stealing in the name of Lord

By Ujudud Shariff
(ujudud@ig yahoo.com)

Reflecting on the weekend story about the reported arrest of the Chief of Staff to the Jigawa State Governor by EFCC operatives over alleged financial scam running into over seven hundred million Naira connected with 2005 Hajj operations and other unwholesome practices relating to the annual pilgrimage, one strongly feels the time has come to stop all the stealing and malpractices in the name of the Lord. The level of fraud perpetrated by government officials at all levels during Hajj operations has become a matter of growing concern by all those interested in fighting corruption in Nigeria.

Corruption associated with the Hajj as indicated can be found at the federal, states and local governments levels. It is not only perpetrated by officials of the pilgrims' boards but also in a number of cases by some high-ranking government officials including state executives. Hajj as a religious obligation for Muslims who have the means is being turned into a drainpipe in which billions of Naira is annually siphoned away by government officials. In many cases, the corruption is perpetrated in collusion with businessmen, bank officials and "men of God". The annual pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia (Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam in which all adult Muslims, provided they have the means of doing so, are obliged to perform the pilgrimage at least once in their life time). One is not sure when governments started to sponsor individuals to Hajj and the reasons for doing so. But it would appear because of the very limited number of those sponsored, government was doing it as a political patronage in addition to assisting those that did not have the means to perform this religious obligation. Whatever were the reasons, it is clear that in recent years, corrupt government officials have found in the religious duty an avenue for looting the treasury. Though I do not have the statistics, one can safely assert that billions of Naira is spent in the name of sponsoring individuals to Hajj by federal, states, local governments as well as even government parastatals. This is in addition to those sponsored to perform professional duties like doctors, nurses, pharmacists, journalists, aid workers, security agents and Islamic preachers.

It is amazing how Hajj sponsorships are being turned into instruments of political patronage for party supporters and relations. The money that could have been utilized to provide social services for the generality of the people are being spent on a few many of whom have performed the Hajj several times over. In the name of religion, public money is being spent unnecessarily and unjustifiably. In Jigawa State, thousands were reportedly sponsored by the state government and hundreds of rams distributed across the country including several to Vice President Atiku Abubakar and President Obasanjo! This manner of distribution of seats cuts across the country including even the Christian governors. Virtually one can also assert that all the state governments in the North including all the local government councils are guilty of this squandering of public money. For example, I learnt on good authority that the Sabon Gari Local Council, Zaria, Kaduna State has sponsored not less than fifty pilgrims for this year's Hajj. In addition to this reckless spending of public funds, some government officials have turned it into a cash cow where they siphoned only God knows how much. They do it in several ways, but one that really caught my imagination is the Jigawa model where fictitious names for sponsorship were made and the money siphoned. The allegation is that between the Chief of Staff and his governor, over one thousand pilgrims are unaccounted for, even though all the monies have disappeared from the treasury. In the Holy Land, they also steal from renting accommodation for the pilgrims in the Holy land where they inflate the rent and provide inferior vehicles as against what even the pilgrims have paid. Also in the name of providing welfare to the pilgrim while in the Holy land, government officials also spend millions out of which a big chunk ends up in their pockets.

From the foregoing, one could see that it is corruption more than anything else that has made the proper organization of the Hajj impossible. As you are reading this, thousand of Nigerians are virtually stranded in Saudi Arabia. Our brethren from Oyo and Ondo states are also crying for help as they have spent all their money and being turned into destitute. Deliberately, government officials sabotage the Hajj operations as they benefit tremendously from the confusion. Right from departure from Nigeria, only God knows what might have transpired between the government officials and the airlines operators selected to carry the pilgrims. By the

manner and ways the airlines behave, it is too much for one to suspect that something must have happened beneath the table. Otherwise, how could the same airlines that misbehaved last year for example be given the same responsibility without being punished? Why is it so difficult for Nigerians to organize a hitch-free Hajj operation with only about 60,000 pilgrims while countries like Indonesia and Malaysia with hundreds of thousand pilgrims conduct the operation with relatively less stress? For over twenty years, every Hajj operation began and ended with crisis in Nigeria. Every year our pilgrims are made to suffer for no fault of theirs. They are conveyed in crisis and many left on the tarmac. The return journey back home has also been a nightmare. Pilgrims are made to sleep in open air at the King Abdul Aziz airport in Jeddah for days. My personal experience was that the Nigerian airline that was supposed to convey the pilgrims back home abandoned them and took other pilgrims from a West African country. The name of the game is greed and making money by all means from the airline operators to the government officials. Also at another level as Senator Ibrahim Mantu and the Amirul Hajj for this year disclosed, the pilgrimage is being sabotaged through the manipulation of the issuance of passports. Deliberately, passports are hidden and artificial scarcity created so that the officials can make money out of the created anxiety.

From the economics, let us shift a little to the politics of Hajj itself and the refusal to have an organized Hajj operation year in and year out. Looking back at the way Hajj operations were conducted in the 1960s and 1970s and compare then with now, it is clear to me the operation was better organized before than now. The unique feature before was that travel agencies privately organized Hajj operations with the government providing consular and other services. If that system, like our democracy has persisted, we might have perfected it by now. But unfortunately, along the way, government took over the operations through federal and states pilgrims' boards. What we have now is corruption in all facets, forms and colours.

This brings me to the issue of establishing a national commission for the Hajj which some people are advocating as a panacea to the problems associated with organizing a successful Hajj operation. But as we indicated, the principal problem is corruption and no matter how many commissions we establish, it will continue to rear its ugly head. The solution to these problems is by taking away the entire exercise from the hands of governments. The role of government should be limited to consular and other matters. In other words, as we said exactly a year ago while commenting on the 2004 Hajj exercise, the operations should be privatized. Let private travel agencies be encouraged to take over the exercise. Already, some agencies have begun conducting the operations and I am told by those that participated in the package, they have done far better than the government pilgrims' boards. It is only in privatizing the Hajj that the nation will be saved from the annual embarrassment and the pilgrims from hardship. We know state governors and other federal officials want an avenue for political patronage or to portray themselves as good Muslims ready to assist their fellow Muslims and in the process win a bit of popularity and support of their citizens. In other words, the critical issue in this regard is Hajj as a public relations vehicle. But beyond public relations, if we look at the issue dispassionately, it will be seen that it is in the best interest of pilgrims that they are allowed to join any private agency conveying them for the pilgrimage. At the state level, state governments can regulate the operators by establishing transparent conditions for operators.

In conclusion, we wish to call for serious punishment for all those stealing in the name of the Lords. Senator Mantu has already promised punishment for those immigration officials that created the artificial scarcity for passports and thereby contributing to the delay in the pilgrims' departure. As for the airlines and the continued delays in departure and return journeys, one only hopes that the federal government would wield the big stick. We urge president Obasanjo to beam the searchlight on Hajj operation and its attendant corruption across. As a beginning, federal government should outlaw the sponsorships of Hajj by all the tiers of government and their agencies. We also urge the EFCC to go to the bottom of the Jigawa State fraud and make an example out of the culprits no matter who is involved. Even if it is the governor that is involved considering the huge amount being allegedly stolen, let it wait for the midnight of 29th May, 2007 when immunity will no longer be in the vocabulary and fear will swap places: those that are feared today, will be the ones who will be overtaken by fear. We are waiting.