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VOL. 10 NO. 91 MONDAY, MARCH 28, 2005 SAFAR 18, 1426 A. H. N80

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N55M BRIBERY SCANDAL

I'm innocent, says Matazu

By Hammeed M. Bello, *Senior Political Reporter*

In his first reaction to his alleged involvement in the N55 million bribery scandal, the education committee chairman of the House of Representatives, Hon. Garba Matazu, swore by the Holy *Qur'an* that he is innocent of the allegation.

Daily Trust exclusively spoke with Matazu on phone yesterday upon his return from his official trip to Asia on Saturday and he swore in the name of God not to know anything about the bribe and that he did not receive a single kobo out of the bribe money as alleged.

He said if he received such money, may the wrath of God befall him and suggested that his name has been smeared in the ostensibly faulty bribery allegation.

On the allegation that he received N10 million out of N15 million collected as bribe from the Federal University of Technology (FUTO), Owerri, Matazu similarly denied this and said he was prepared to face the House committee on Ethics and Privileges to defend himself because he believes in the triumph of good over evil.

Expressing confidence that he will come out of the controversy without blemish, Matazu said he will meet with the leadership of the House today to clarify issues and to defend himself, because he has not committed any offence, according to him.

Contd. on Pg 2



R-L: Mallam Salihu Abubakar (Amir), Alhaji Muhammed Sadiq Abubakar and Mallam Mustapha Isa Qasim, during press conference on the 10th Annual Ummah convention by the National Islamic Centre, Zaria, held at the National Mosque, Abuja... Saturday.

Pix: Felix Onigbinde.

15 burnt to death on Ghanaian ship

By Jibril Abubakar, *Reporter (Foreign Desk) with agency report*

At least 15 people are feared dead after they were trapped on a burning ship in Ghana's main port of Tema.

Two survivors managed to jump to safety as the blaze broke out on the *MV Polaris*. The Greek-registered vessel was destroyed by the heat.

The flames have been put out but thick plumes of smoke wafted across the port after Friday's fire.

Police suspect the blaze began when a spark from a welding job set fire to oil leaking from a pipe.

The boat was being repaired in Tema, just 18km from the capital, Accra, when the fire broke out.

"The vessel is totally lost and all human beings on board are feared dead," Energy Minister, Mike Ocquaye, told reporters.

Ports Ministe,r Christopher Ameyaw-Akumfi, said nine people were confirmed

Contd. on Pg 2

Senate reconvenes tomorrow, may move against Wabara

By Isa Sanusi, *Senior Political Reporter*

The senate is set to disrupt its Easter break and reconvene tomorrow, to attend to the N55 million bribery scandal involving the Senate President, Adolphus Wabara. There are indications also that some lawmakers will demand Wabara's resignation.

Daily Trust gathered that the decision to reconvene was reached after the series of meetings which began Thursday through the weekend where the senators agreed that for Nigerians to take them serious, there was need to reconvene and deliberate on how to tackle the bribery scandal.

Speaking to *Daily Trust* on telephone yesterday, Senator Sule Yari Gandi said the Senate is worried by the negative image the scandal has attracted to the legislature but insisted that the Senate should be allowed to use its in-house mechanism to investigate the matter.

"It is the culture of legis-

Contd. on Pg 2

Prominent Nigerians mourn FRA Williams

From Suleiman Mohammed, *Associate Editor (South),* **Adelanwa Bamgboye,** *Correspondent in Lagos,* **Abdullahi M. Gulloma,** *Reporter in Abuja*

Prominent Nigerians including lawyers, Judges and sympathizers, over the weekend continued to shower encomiums on the late Chief Frederick Rotimi Alade Williams a.k.a Timi the law.

The legal luminary died Saturday, at 11.00 pm in his Lagos residence located at Ilupeju after he returned from a medical treatment abroad.

Some of the early callers include Chief Lateef

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News

I'm innocent *Contd. from Pg 1*

Also, he said he will on Wednesday in Abuja, meet with the national working committee (NWC) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), to defend himself and that he will subsequently address the press to make his position known to Nigerians. Obasanjo had written to the National Assembly and copied the PDP on the matter.

It would be recalled that Hon. Matazu is one of the three members of the House of Representatives indicted by President Obasanjo in his national broadcast for alleged involvement in bribery and corrupt practices.

The two others named by the president, Hon. Gabriel Suswan, Appropriations Committee chairman, and Hon. Osita Izunaso, Housing and Urban Development committee chairman, have at a joint press conference, accused the president of victimising them because they were not members of the education committee, and couldn't have participated in the bribe alleged to have been received by the education committees of the House and the senate.

They both faulted the president's allegation on the grounds that they were not given fair hearing and that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission's (EFCC), report upon which the president's accusation was based said investigation was still on-going.

Matazu was to appear before the Ethics and Privileges committee of the House to defend himself, but could not because he was said to have travelled out of the country.

Two members of his (Matazu) committee, Hons. Usman Bugaje and Haruna Yarima had written him expressing fears and soliciting explanations over perceived rumours of bribery that was said to be haunting the committee.

It is not clear whether or not the explanations sought have been given but the House held an executive session to take a stand over the matter. Some members had resolved to jointly sponsor a motion under matters of privileges, to call for an independent investigation of the education committee.

This, they believed, was the only way to safeguard the integrity of the House as an institution.

Senate *Contd. from Pg 1*

latures all over the world to independently handle issues like this. That is why every legislature has a committee on Ethics. So we should be allowed to investigate and adopt the final findings of our committee on ethics. No one from outside should tell us what to do or how to do it," he said.

Senator Yari Gandi noted that as soon as the senate reconvenes, it will examine all the issues at hand. When asked whether Wabara will remain in his position up to the end of the investigations, the lawmaker retorted: "I am not sure about that one."

Secretary of Northern Senators Forum, Senator Saidu Dansadau, over the weekend, told a national newspaper that in view of the enormity of the allegations against the senate president, the only alternative is for Wabara to vacate office immediately, guilty or not guilty.

Dansadau further said: "It is improper for him to continue in office, at least let him step aside and allow an investigation. It is against the principle of natural justice for Wabara to remain a judge in his own court. We have been cooperating with him. You know there had been many problems in the senate. We have always discussed it and he would ask for the understanding of the senators. He did it once, twice even when 84 senators signed a motion for his impeachment. He must resign to save the senate."

The lawmaker insisted that unless Wabara resigns, the integrity of the entire senate is gone, adding that there will be no peace in the senate for as long as Wabara remains the senate president. Some of us are hell bent on seeing that he goes."

Meanwhile the embattled Wabara had a breakfast meeting with his colleagues at his Apo mansion where he explained to them his position on the scandal and solicited their understanding.

Reliable sources told *Daily Trust* that some senators may move a motion for the impeachment of the senate president on Tuesday even though some insisted that an investigation has to be conducted as agreed earlier by the senate.

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), had taken the position that Wabara must resign even though the leadership of the senate claimed not to know about the party's position while Wabara maintained that he did not and does not intend to vacate his position.

Jostling for Wabara's position has continued particularly among senators from the South-East zone. Top contenders are Senators Ifeanyi Araraume, Ike Ekweremadu and Ken Nnamani whom many senators prefer to be their next leader.



Senate President, Wabara

Controversy trails privatization loan disbursement

By Ahmed I. Shekarau, *Group Business Editor*

The disbursement of funds to Nigerians wishing to acquire shares under the Privatisation Share Purchase Loan Scheme (PSPLS), is currently trailed by controversy with the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) and the consortium engaged to oversee the exercise contradicting each other on total amount made available to the investing public.

While the PSPLS management consortium, comprising Denham Management Limited, Oceanic Bank Plc and Infosoft and Interstae Securities revealed that the BPE only paid it the sum of $5.7 million (about N720 million), the Director General of the Bureau, Mrs. Irene Chigbue, said the agency paid up to $6.17 million (about N865 million).

In the report submitted by the consortium to the House of Representatives Committee on Privatisation and Commercialisation which held a public hearing on the delay in the take-off of the scheme, it said the BPE paid only $5.7m.

The report of the consortium contradicts the claims of Mrs. Chigbue, last Tuesday that the bureau had paid $6.17 million to the PSPLS consortium, out of the $41 million contract sum.

According to the report made available to *Daily Trust* on Friday in Abuja, the consortium disclosed that it received 25 per cent of the initial agreed payment of $2.2 million (about N270 million), in January 2003 and another $3.5 million (about N450 million), in July 2003.

"The PSPLS consortium is supposed to have been paid N1 billion in September 2002 but this was not done due to BPE's financial constraint.

"The dollar contract sum was an all-inclusive fee for the five-year duration of the project covering both consultancy/management fees and operational expenses to be used in executing the extensive scope of services throughout the length and breadth of the federation," the consortium stated.

It alleged that the BPE breached the contract by not paying the initial fees agreed in the contract for commencement of work.

"The activities on the PSPLS were actually proceeding more or less as planned until the former Director-General of BPE, Dr. Julius Bala, took over office in August 2003.

"The consortium set up a series of meetings with Dr. Bala to welcome him on board and introduce him to the project as well as brief him on the status and next steps, but these meetings dragged on and on", it added.

The report presented by the consortium alleged further that: "Bala went out of his way to kill the project by stopping all marketing efforts, hampering the consortium from doing its work and effectively squeezing the consortium with all kinds of threats.

"All this was done under the guise of renegotiating the contract which he had been mandated to do in the absence of funds by the National Council on Privatisation," the consortium said.

The consortium cautioned against any attempt to destroy the PSPLS, which it said has so far registered 200,000 Nigerians.



Deputy Governor of Kaduna State, Engineer Stephen Shekari (left) in a handshake with Prof. Ishaya Audu at the one-day awareness seminar on the 2005 national population and housing census, organised by the Kaduna State census publicity committee in Kaduna... recently

Prominent *Contd. from Pg 1*

Adegbite, Secretary-General, Islamic Council of Nigeria and Sariki of Egbaland, the Acting Inspector General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, Prof. Bolaji Ayorinde, Chief Folarin Coker, Mr. Femi Falana and judges from the Superior Courts including Supreme Court judges.

In a chat with newsmen, eldest son of the deceased, Chief Ladi Williams (SAN), said stepping into his father's shoes was out of it as everybody has his own shoes.

He explained that the late legal luminary who has participated in all the constitutional conferences since independence would have preferred members of the constitutional conference to be elected rather than being selected.

Chief Ladi Williams (SAN), members of the deceased family and the church will have to meet before the announcement of the burial arrangements.

"If you talk about the law, he (late Chief F.R.A. Williams), lived for the law, practiced the law and died for the law," the eldest son of the deceased said.

Also present at the deceased residence were members of the Ikeja branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), as well as family members and sympathizers.

In his condolence message, former Chief Judge of Lagos State, Justice Christopher Segun, described the deceased as "a father of fathers and lawyer of lawyers," adding that his knowledge of law was legendary. "How are the mighty fallen? An end of an era. A great loss to the legal profession and the entire nation," the former CJ said.

According to Mr. Femi Falana, late Chief F.R.A. Williams was a *primus inter pares* (first among equals) among his contemporaries.

Julius Adeluyi Esq. wrote that it would be very difficult to find another F.R.A. Williams.

The acting IG, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, said "I think we will always miss him and I am here on behalf of the entire Nigeria police."

Governor Gbenga Daniel of Ogun State described the death as an irreparable loss to Ogun State, Nigeria, Africa and the world legal community. He said in a brief statement in Lagos that the late Williams would be remembered by those in the legal profession forever.

In his response, Chief Gani Fawehinmi described late Williams as a legal knowledge per excellence, saying that the late legal luminary was the most senior lawyer ever produced in the country.

In the same vein, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), said yesterday that the late Williams would be missed not only by his family but by the legal profession to which he devoted an eventful and dynamic years.

The NLC in a statement signed by its general secretary, John E. Odah, said the late Williams made outstanding contributions that enriched the practice of law that is yet unrivalled.

15 burnt *Contd. from Pg 1*

dead including four whose bodies have been recovered, AFP news agency reports.

In addition to Ghanaians, there was also one Russian, one Greek and one Guinean on board, the BBC's correspondent reports from Accra.

Pipelines leading to Ghana's only oil refinery have been damaged but Mr. Ameyaw-Akumfi says there are enough strategic supplies to avoid any short-term problems.

Ben Owusu-Mensah, director-general of the Ghana Ports and Harbour Authority, said the Tema oil refinery had shut down its pipeline but residual oil in it was still burning.

"The biggest blow is that the pumping room of the refinery has been completely destroyed by fire," he said.

Some 80 firefighters were involved in the operation to contain the blaze.

A supply belt leading to an aluminum smelter was also damaged.

The landlocked countries of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have switched much of their trade to Tema, since conflict broke out in Ivory Coast in September 2002.

Ghana exports coffee, cocoa and cotton through the port, reports Reuters news agency.

News

Osuji still in hospital

By Henry Omunu, *Senior Reporter (Education)*

Sacked Education Minister, Prof. Fabian Osuji, is still in hospital receiving treatment for an undisclosed ailment after being rushed to hospital last Friday, by family members.

The minister had just a week ago lost his job following his indictment by President Obasanjo in a nationwide broadcast for offering a N55m bribe to some members of the National Assembly.

On Thursday, the ex-minister had gone to court to bar the federal government and any of its agents from infringing on his fundamental human rights.

But, unfortunately, Prof. Osuji was said to have taken ill last Friday and had to be rushed to an unknown hospital in Abuja, with sou-rces describing his condition as "very critical."

When an aide to the sacked minister, Mr. Tobs Agbaegbu spoke to *Daily Trust* yesterday, he said the minister was still receiving treatment at the hospital and that he was unaware of his being discha-rged.

The aide who added that he was just returning from an Easter church service, declared that the minister's family has not passed any inform-ation to the effect that he has been discharged from hosp-ital.

To the best of his knowledge, Mr. Agbaegbu said, the minister was still in hospital.

He had however confirmed at the weekend that the ex-minister's health condition might not be unconnected with the "trauma he went through in the last two weeks" since the bribery scandal hit the headlines, including his detention for about five days by the EFCC.

Hospital sources and reports in the media suggests that Prof. Osuji had an unusually high blood pressure when he was taken to hospital and doctors may have presc-ribed a complete bedrest to reduce the high blood pre-ssure.

How Cuba achieved 100 per cent literacy, says minister

From Sani Babadoko, *Bureau Chief (Kaduna)*

The Republic of Cuba has called on Nigeria to adopt its educational revolution that has led to its attainment of a record 100 per cent literacy level.

Making the call during a familiarisation visit to facilities at the National Teachers' Institute (NTI), Kaduna, Cuba's Deputy Minister of Education, Mr. Eduordo Cruz, disclosed that Cuba had to do away with unnecessary expenses not directly related to education.

The minister who was accompanied by the coun-try's ambassador to Nigeria, Mrs. Oilaida Cebrera, said his country had to do away with flashy cars and other perquisites to improve the literacy rate which was very low in 1959 after the revolution.

"In Cuba, we have the belief that the best investment the country can provide to the people is in education and this should be both basic and primary education."

Mr. Cruz remarked that Cuban leader, Fidel-Castro, is providing solid leadership for building the country's revolution with an understanding that, "whatever we want to attain in the country in the next 30 years must come from the building up of the children."

The minister who spoke in Spanish with the ambassador translating said, "so Cuba before the revolution, the situation under the education sector was a disa-ster. And that time, we had just six million population and only one million of them were literate. More than 100,000 children do not have any hope of accessing primary school, while more than 10,000 graduate teachers were unemployed."

Mr. Cruz said in turning the situation around, "the first thing the revolution did was to embark on a national campaign on literacy and in one year, we reached the capacity to give education to one million Cubans."

He said, "so, it means that for more than 40 years, Cuba has totally eradicated illiteracy in its territory. But then, it was necessary to ensure that the situation is never reversed in Cuba.

"Some of those illiterate at the time of the revolution became P.hd holders and we can boast of 60,000 professors after 30 years of the revolution."

Cruz however pointed out that it took a lot of sacrifice by the leaders to sustain the path of development adding, "today, that is why you cannot see Cubans living in expensive houses and buy-ing expensive cars or other unnecessary luxuries."

NTI director, Dr. Ahmed Modibbo Mohammed, in a welcome address, said the institute was established in 1976 to satisfy the pressing need for trained and qualified teachers at all levels.

Modibbo said the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE), in 1976 led to an unprecedented Cuba explosion in primary school enrolment and a high demand for qualified teachers.

NUB woos Kano investors

From Musa Umar Kazaure, *Regional Editor (Kano)*

The NUB International Bank Limited has mapped out strategies to attain the 25 billion naira recapitalisation goal through the sourcing of additional equity capital of ten billion naira.

Announcing the strategy in Kano at the bank's customer forum, the chairman/CEO of the bank, Alhaji Imam Yahaya said when the N10b naira is added to existing shareholders' funds, the bank's new shareholders fund will be in the region of 11.7billion.

He added that after the private placement exercise, the bank will present itself for listing on the floors of The Nigeria Stock Exchange by act of introduction which will lead to the commencement of the initial public offer that will place the shares of the bank at the disposal of general investor public.

The chairman stated that the proceed of IPO which is estimated to be about 15 billion dollar funds will place NUB above the minimum CBN stipulated capitalisation for Nigerian banks adding that, "if after the IPO, NUB's shareholders' funds still falls short of the minimum requirement of 25billion naira, we shall go ahead and commence negotiations to consummate a merger with other banks of similar business culture, management orientation and organisational attributes."

He announced that already, the bank has reached advanced stages of negotiations with a group of banks with a view to signing a multilateral MOU. The objectives, he said, is to establish a mega-bank with branch network covering all major centres of economic activities in Nigeria, as well as providing a strong reach into the major markets of the West African sub-saharan region and beyond.

Alhaji Yahaya stated that though the NUB strategic initiative of standing alone may look too ambitious, they are however propelled by overwhelming opportunities that present themselves in the market which they intend to exploit for the benefit of their shareholders. He also spoke of moves by NUB to work with other stakeholders towards reviving and modernising the old broad agriculture base of our economy especially in the northern parts of the country.

Kano state deputy governor, Engr. Abdullahi Magaji, had earlier praised the administrative and banking acumen of NUB International management team and called on investors to patronise the bank as it is the bank of the future adding that with industries fast collapsing in Kano, investors should patronise investment in banks.

FG flags off N2b Kwara road project

By Nasir Imam *Asst News Editor*

As part of its efforts to link Nigeria with all neighbouring countries through good roads, the federal government has flagged-off the construction of the Chikanda-Kosuboso-Okita-Ilesha-Baruba Oyo state boundary road in Kwara state at a cost of over N2 billion.

At the flag-off ceremony, works minister, Senator Adeseye Ogunlewe, who represented president Olusegun Obasanjo, stated that the road will link Nigeria with Benin Republic through the border town of Chikanda in Kwara state.

He disclosed that government was working on similar projects to link Nigeria with the Republic of Niger, Benin, Chad and Cameroon through various road projects in Sokoto, Yobe, Katsina, Borno and Kebbi states.

Senator Ogunlewe stated that the completion of the road projects would widen Nigeria's market as most of the neighbouring countries relied on Nigeria for most of their economic activities and announced that five hundred million naira has been provided in the 2005 budget for the take-off of the project and commended the corpo-ration of the Kwara state government who offered to start off the project on behalf of the federal government.

Responding to a question on the perceived delay in the completion of the Ilorin-Ogbomosho-Ibadan dualisaton project, Senator Ogunlewe expressed hope that members of the National Assembly from the North central zone and South-south zones would be able to meet and harmonise their positions so that adequate funds could be appropriated for the road which cuts across the two zones.

He said the Chikanda-Oyo state boundary road project is 125.5 kilometre long and will be constructed in standard two lane carriage, to be constructed by messrs KY-FY Global Nigeria Limited and Messrs SETRACO Nig. Ltd at a coast of over N2 billion, with a completion period of 20 months.

Kwara state governor, Dr. Bukola Saraki, at the ceremony, while thanking President Obasanjo for approving the project, recalled that the deplorable state of the road had over the years, improved communication and social life and put agriculture and business activities in the area under great inconveniences.



Gov. Olusola Saraki

GOV. GOJE'S DAUGHTERS' WED

It is the joy and wish of every parent to live and witness the wedding of their children.The Executive Governor of Gombe State, **Alhaji Mohammed Danjuma** Goje, *Sarkin Yakin Gombe,* will *insha Allah* be giving out two of his daughters, **Zainab and Husseina Mohammed Goje** in a wedding *fatiha* on **Saturday April 9, 2005**

Friends, associates and well-wishers of the first family of Gombe Stae are enjoined to send their goodwill/felicitations to the couples and their respective families on this joyous occasion.

For participation, please contact the **Special Projects Department of Media Trust Limited** on any of these numbers; **08037038663, 08042145839, 0803216731,08037020244, 08028494170 or 09-6720346.**

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MANAGEMENT

News Focus

The thin line between lobbying and bribery

By Isa Sanusi, *Political Reporter, Senate*

In the senate's executive session after President Obasanjo's broadcast on corruption, an eloquent senator took a long time telling his colleagues that the kind of money they take in the course of their legislative duties is not bribe as the president called it, it is rather lobby which is allowed in the legislative culture of all democratic nations. Lobbying is acceptable and allowed in all democracies and it takes so many forms. It at times comes in the form of a gift to lawmakers which have limits by law. The gift may be a piece of pen or a book. Writing a letter to the lawmakers soliciting their support on a bill is also a form of lobby. Visits to legislator's offices and homes are also another means of lobbying them. Precisely, lobby is all about trying to persuade lawmakers to support or oppose changes to law. Bribe on the other hand is money given or offered to somebody in return for often dishonest help. However, even in more developed democracies like the US, corporate bodies contribute money to the campaign funds of legislators with the intention of getting their support whenever any legislation comes up that affects the corporation. Nowhere has lobby looked like what happened between the National Assembly and the dismissed minister of education.

The contradiction

Reports have it that those who took the N55 million bribe from the former minister of education, Professor Fabian Osuji, returned the money and handed it over to the EFCC. If this is entirely true, then the National Assembly will have no reason to hang on to the conspiracy theory that the president is all out to discredit the legislature so as to arrogate more powers to himself. Many of the lawmakers whose names made it to the list of dishonor read to the nation by the president have at the beginning denied that there was any problem between the senate committee on education and the minister over budget. In separate chats with *Daily Trust* last week, some members of the senate committee on education that include, Senators Daniel Saror, Abba Aji and Sule Yari Gandi, claimed that to the best of their knowledge as members of the committee, there has never been any problems over the budget and between the committee and the minister. To them, the 2005 budget of the ministry of education has been concluded.

Then came the revelation of Senator Emmanuel Okpede who was the vice chairman of the committee on education when the shady transaction was carried out. He contradicted his colleagues by establishing the fact that indeed there was a problem over the budget between lawmakers and the minister. He said: "As I tell you, I was vice chairman of the education committee. I do know that on the last day we had a joint sitting of the two houses, we concluded our budget. I don't know how the minister of education knew that we did something we have done in the interest of Nigeria last year. In 2004, we introduced the Direct Teaching and Research Cost in the budget which was not brought by the executive. We decided to move monies from over head which were being expended on transport and paying claims and not actually in addressing teaching and consumables for laboratories. So we decided to move money and created a sub head i.e. DTRC, for all universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. During our oversight visit, we discovered that all the academics were pleased with that allocation. But when the budget of 2005 came, this DTRC was allocated zero- zero and the overhead was loaded with money, so we decided to move them back since this is what will make teaching more effective. Somehow we closed our issues. In the evening, I was called to attend a meeting at the senate president's house. I don't know for what purpose. I came there and met the minister of education. He said he learnt that the budget has been concluded and that he still had complaints." From what Senator Okpede said, it was no longer doubtful that the minister of education had some problems with the way his budget was structured. One will then wonder why and how the budget loaded so much money on the over head. Why will Osuji be worried that portions of his overhead has been shifted to a very good course that will develop teaching and research.!



Senate President, Adolphus Wabara



Prof. Fabian Osuji, former Education Minister

Wabara in his own story proved that of course there was a problem between the minister and the National Assembly over the budget. He said: "Sometimes in December 2004, a senator (Chris Adighije), who was a close friend of the minister of education, Professor Fabian Osuji, reported to the President of the Senate that the minister was having serious problems with the chairmen of education committees in both houses concerning the budget of the ministry of education. The senate president accepted to intervene so as to ensure quick passage of the 2005 budget. At no point at the meeting was any form of monetary demands made from the minister; at no point did the senate president ask the minister to give money to anybody"

Senator Okpede like other of his other colleagues, have been denying taking any money or being interrogated by the EFCC based on whose report Obasanjo went on prime time television .

Temptation of self investigation

The senate which has been more damaged by the whole scandal is now of the opinion that blowing the scandal in the manner the president did is unfair and was intended to ridicule the legislature. The senate, through deputy senate president, Ibrahim Mantu, said "While acknowledging the efforts initiated by Mr. President to fight corruption, the senate howver believes that a public broadcast of incidences of corruption affecting the National Assembly, where no such broadcast were made on more damaging allegations against many members of the executive, creates the impression that the National Assembly is being targeted for public and international ridicule."

The senate stood its grounds denying of all the charges against its members until proven otherwise by an investigation of its committee on ethics which is set to commence investigations by the 5th of April.

This is not the first time that the senate investigated corruption charges against its own. The same committee under the chairmanship of Senator Adeleke Mamora investigated the el-Rufai bribery saga involving senators Ibrahim Mantu and Jonathan Zwingina. At the end of it all, the issue was concluded by the senate based on the grounds that el-Rufai could not produce any evidence to substantiate his allegation. The same committee investigated the plot last year to unseat Wabara but it all ended without taking any measures or punishing any of the principal actors in the move that was said to have been sponsored from outside the senate.

Senator Mamora and members of this committee will have to change course to prove that the senate can discipline itself and earn integrity and respect. One of the ways to do this is by ensuring that all sittings of the committee are done in the open. Hiding any aspect of the investigation will affect the integrity of the outcome. A leading scholar on US congress, Dennis Thompson, was of the opinion that "legislators rarely report improprieties of their colleagues and they even more rarely criticize colleagues in public for neglecting their legislative duties. In brief, self regulation appears to have little credibility with the public. Committees can be partisan. Roles that are best kept distinct, that is, investigation, adjudication and imposing sanctions are intermingled leading to a perception or a possibility that natural justice may not be done." The ultimate emergence of the senate from this image damage depends to a large extent on the ability of this committee to do its work with objectivity and a sense of responsibility to the public.

Ethics will have to come in the more in the way the senate chooses its leaders and it must be made clear that the president does not and should not be intervening or even picking for the upper chamber who and who should preside over its affairs. From 1999 till date, the presidency has never shied aware from encroaching into the choice by lawmakers of who will lead them. This was one of the reasons why leadership of both chambers always faces questions of credibility.

Investigations into this matter should begin with the money said to have been taken as bribe from the minister of education and who exactly took the money and what modality was used in sharing the money and at whose instance. The EFCC has said that the money has been returned and the public should know how and who refunded the money, where and when. This will help in restoring the confidence of Nigerians in the legislature and ridding the institution of corrupt individuals.

Dismissing the whole issue as an attempt by the president to discredit the National Assembly will not help matters. Afterall, it was the same National Assembly that always blindly endorses whatever the president wants. It is the same national assembly that has been ignoring many big corruption allegations against the Executive arm. The lawmakers will not help themselves by trying to make the whole matter look like a political witch hunt or victimization.

"Senator Mamora and members of this committee will have to change course to prove that the senate can discipline itself and earn integrity and respect. One of the ways to do this is by ensuring that all sittings of the committee are done in the open. Hiding any aspect of the investigation will affect the integrity of the outcome. A leading scholar on US congress, Dennis Thompson, was of the opinion that "legislators rarely report improprieties of their colleagues and they even more rarely criticize colleagues in public for neglecting their legislative duties. In brief, self regulation appears to have little credibility with the public. Committees can be partisan. Roles that are best kept distinct, that is, investigation, adjudication and imposing sanctions are intermingled leading to a perception or a possibility that natural justice may not be done."

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REFLECTIONS

By ISSA AREMU

Reading the (Coruption) news

Recent graft news explosion involving the gang of some executive/legislative alleged bribe-givers and bribe takers alike tasks a creative imagination. What does one make out of those who have singled out Mr President for commendation in having the 'courage' to stem the tide of corruption? Some observers note that to have ever assumed the Commander- in -Chief would lack courage to catch thieves in the first instance was grossly misleading.

If a President was lacking in courage, pray, who then could have such necessary courage for such task? They insist that catching thieves is what every citizen does every other day in the cities and villages once the chorus; *Ole, Ole* hit the waves, without undue acknowledgment much less commendation. Why then should that of Mr President who has constitutional obligation to ensure corruption free polity and economy prove an exception? Police at numerous occasions did display exceptional 'courage' summarily executed robbery suspects (note; not convicts!) why then should summary dismissal of confirmed alleged Minister-bribe giver and sanctions for other partners in crime extraordinarily be news worthy?

Many observers insist that Nigerians deserving of commendation are actually those who long noticed Wabara's feet of clay given his corrupt 'mandate' origin at a time Mr President shielded him against criticisms and even impeachment by his own colleagues on account of doing them in extortion. In fact Mr President who is not known for flattery accepted as much when he observed in his speech that the Wabara's involvement in the recent 'sordid matter' '..tends to vindicate those who made similar allegations in the past'.

Not a few observers are even more critical. They argued that the Presidential broadcast at best is one additional overkill and at worse, an abuse of executive airtime. According to them the basic rule of corporate governance says Chief Executive does not hire and fire (even if she/he catches corporate thieves as he must!). On the contrary the organization does the hiring and firing via corporate affairs or personnel departments. In fact many observers insist that the ease with which Mr President rushes to the tube once he is with 'heavy heart', calls to question the redefinition of due process in governance?

Even in a one-man enterprise, a COE must still delegate to those who will happily say '*I am directed*' leaving room in the process for a plausible organizational reappraisal or organizational reinforcement, if any. The spectacle of a President who doubles as the chairman of AU and Commonwealth, acting a common personnel officer, issuing out query/ dismissal letters via television, and possibly become a witness in a law court in case of contestation, they say, was better imagined! Perhaps anti-corruption crusade is too important such that only the President's whistle-blowing would make a special difference. But many opinioned that most of the remarks by the President are better left with presidential spokesmen and women!

However went to raise far reaching substantive issues rather than procedures. Many observers (including Vanguard newspaper in its editorial of Friday 25th march), put to question the sense of fairness of the President as a personnel officer. They wonder aloud about the speed of discovery and sanctions for Wabara, Osuji and others why there was no similar broadcast or official confirmation on Tafa Balogun's alleged greater multi-billion naira scam (or was it all rumour?) which allegedly led to his forced exit. They wonder aloud if indivisibility of Nigeria is not applicable to justice and fairness given that while there is an official overkill of one menace we handle another scourge with kid-glove. Which then raises the question about what is the remote cause or latent motivation for the President's 'new war on corruption'?

According to General Ishola Williams, Secretary-General *Transparency in Nigeria* four groups recently put pressures on Mr President on the need to seriously combat corruption (Punch, 26th March). These groups are certainly NOT inclusive of Mr President's ruling party nor the opposition parties nor his economic team! They are according to Williams; '*The European Union for Fighting Corruption in Nigeria, the Millennium Challenge Accounts Agency of United States government, the Africa Peer Review Mechanism and Transparency in Nigeria*'. Guardian newspaper (Sunday, 27th of March) reported as much that the President 'hit hard' at official corruption on the prodding of Chancellor Schroeder of Germany in return for some expected dividends for debt relief. If this account of the source of renewed presidential motivation was true, whence then the much acknowledged official courage and conviction? How sustainable is anti-corruption campaign based on the occasional reminder of some external benefactors? Is anti-corruption a matter of public relations or an enduring commitment to remove the distortion in the nation's system of reward and motivation in which well-having by the few substitutes for the well being of the majority?

If absolute corruption makes absolute basket mouth out of the absolutely corrupt, then absolute exposure and absolute graft disclosures make the absolutely guilty absolutely humbled. Observers watch with keen interest how Wabara who while marking 100 days as Senate President in office launched a media blitz with a publication; *Where I STAND* suddenly today maintain I Have NO STAND at all before the airport paparazzi during the weekend. News watchers recall that the Wabara is (was?) also *Bamoku of Egbaland* who recently promised us *Liberty, Equity and Accountability and Developmen*t (LEAD) and even recommended same for all.

All said, the accusations and counter accusations over corruption once again mean Nigeria enters the globalised world from the negative. More so that there is no assurance that multiple official seizures and disclosures about millions just after previous 'recovered billions' would put an end to power failure, water shortage and factory failure. What is clear however is that we certainly cannot meet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through celebration of catching of thieves until recovery of loot translates to recovery of the people from the worsening poverty?

(issaaremu@yahoo.com)

Opinion

FCT's funny master plan

Where the vision is one year, cultivate flowers; where the vision is ten years, cultivate trees; where the vision is eternity, cultivate people – **Oriental saying**

By Moses Kolade

I am of the holistic school of thought. My instinct also tells me what will be wrong in the long run and what will be worthwhile. So, each time I hear my yuppy friends agree with the level of destruction going on in Abuja in the name of beautification, a fresh wave of sadness seizes me. Two events prompted this write-up. First I ran into the above oriental saying which tells a story, and then I witnessed the scene of a ghastly road mishap at Bwari Junction on Sunday the 13th of March 2005.

While the firebrand Minister has made it clear that he is fearless and can achieve just about anything he conceives, I think someone should begin to assist him to channel his boundless energy and imagination into more enduring, positive purposes. The accident at Bwari Junction is just one of the several that mars the beautiful landscape of Abuja on daily basis. Of course life is cheap in Nigeria so it doesn't matter whose family member it is that checks out in that untimely manner except it's a big-man. Then the papers will be awash with condolence adverts. Recently it was Colonel Yabilsu, Etim Oyosoro etc… I saw lying on the floor, dead, that afternoon a gentleman wearing Jeans top and trousers who could well be somebody's bread winner or who could be such a nice person to some people, but who has been extinguished in a flash, on the ever smooth Abuja Roads. Suffice to say that I have also lost a number of friends on these roads.

Now to the issue of flower planting and beautification: Invariably the Oriental people who coined the above saying could not have had El-Rufai in mind back then. All they did was state an eternal truth. Fortunately or unfortunately the saying goes to the marrow for El-Rufai and his paymasters who are presently rendering people homeless and annihilating many a business, just to plant flowers. The density of gardens in Abuja today is embarrassing. Many are already overgrown with weed (remember the one year vision), and all but the so-called Millenium park are not patronized. I am convinced that what our people need is not sit-in-the-grass kind of relaxation but a total overhaul of values through education.

The attempt to pick Abuja up and throw it into the 22nd century has all but failed because the guys who run government today have their brains floating in the skies. They are at best puritans (they remind you of Adolf Hitler, figuratively and otherwise). They are Machiavellians who believe in the total destruction and reduction to a state of vegetable, of fellow human beings in order to command fear. The sacredness of all human life is totally lost on them. The need to protect and serve rather than brutalise the lowliest of Nigerians is foreign to their orientation.

The so-called master plan is not supposed to be sacrosanct. Afterall they say man proposes and God disposes. It is obvious by now that the masterplan is replete with a lot of planlessness. Where are the bus terminals? Where are the train tracks? Does the plan assume that everybody in the FCT will be riding on metred black cabs only? Where will staff of big men stay and how do they convey themselves to work? Did the masterplan determine *ab initio* to push every average salary earner and these artisans to Nasarawa and Niger States? Did the masterplan project that houses will be built with the new-found long-span roofing sheets that colours the town so beautifully though it was conceived in the age of grey slates and tin roofs? Which type of building materials does it recommend? Did it make room for technological advancement? Did it make room for Acts of God that could change the very basis on which it stands? I'm sure that the masterplan could not have had any provision for 'generator houses' in any building in the FCT. These are a few questions that may be asked. Very importantly, the master plan was construed on a progressive development of the Nigerian polity. It could not have taken into consideration the unparalleled pillaging of the Nigerian commonwealth.

The way things are going, the FCT Government should go and import any other people but present-day Nigerians to come and inhabit Abuja. As it stands the reclaiming of the master plan is becoming a wasteful venture and at best a flight of fancy which is not in the long-term interest of Nigerians. Though our leaders are more concerned about impressions to visitors than the truth. They are like the proverbial father whose children are not fed for days but who has money to host political gigs for his friends.

Privatization is interpreted by our government as the right to abdicate responsibility totally and recklessly.

If I was El-Rufai (and I'm not gunning for his job), I would have invested in speed limits all over the FCT. I do not mind having to save people from themselves. The whiteman who invented the automobile and sold some to us does not agree to indiscriminate speeding. Every modern country today has serious Traffic Marshalls who keep a check on the excesses of their people. Here, nobody thinks it is important to have even road signs advising motorists to slow down to particular speed limits. And so the flowers end up being watered with the blood of citizens, reckless or sober, guilty or innocent. By refusing to set and enforced speed limits, the administration only confirms that Nigerians are no better than lower animals, just as their capacity for double-speak drives them to beautify a city full of slightly advanced monkeys.

I posit that this administration has increased the cases of mental illness amongst Nigeria by at least 40%. Many a decision taken by Government and the repetitiveness of mistakes and anti-people policies, do not come across as those of rational thinkers. As the FCT runners demolish buildings and businesses, they can rest assured that more mad and depressed men get on the streets daily, driving and thinking, driving and drinking or driving and boiling with rage.

Add this to the normal tendency of government officials to allow their entourage chase other road users into confusion and sometimes death, and you begin to appreciate the enormity of the problem. In fact, this factor is the singular most formidable reason why this much-needed investment in speed-limit road signs, and possibly cameras cannot work. Left for the common masses, they will comply after a few examples have been made of them. But what do we say of those elected guys who allow their entourage to run at break-neck speed along Abuja's many highways? Not for them the many traffic lights. They violate such with impunity, even though they know that Tony Blair cannot try that in UK, our colonizers. That was what I told the erstwhile British High Commissioner, Mr Phillip Thomas, the day I saw him beat the red traffic light in Maitama. Of course, he was only copying our big-men.

I wonder if really our public office holders are always in a hurry and why. Are they such bad managers of their time? If so, can they be managers of our collective resources? If they are always seized by this sense of urgency, then why is Nigeria not the best country in the world for their enthusiasm? I think the dastardly hurry, of which I have been victim many times, is more a question of security. But then they say it's the guilty that are afraid. Why accept a public position if you will always live in fear? The fact that Ministers drive themselves to work in Great Britain for example has not made their work less efficient.

The other way Mallam El-Rufai could have invested in people is in the prioritization of his actions. Whereas it is easy to invest in bull-dozers, mobile sign-board cutting machines, and other ventures that destroy but don't build, not much is being done in the area of infrastructure building. The most frightening in their bag of negative ingenuity is the institution of some people who clamp tyres of wrongly parked cars but are made to dress like undertakers! Why is it so much easier to do evil so perfectly than to do good so partially? As the metropolis increases in beauty daily, not a single bridge enters Kubwa with its population of over a million. So as cars cross the Kaduna bound expressway every second, more manure is being provided for the flowers with the blood and corpses of hapless Nigerians. If he had thrown in two bridges and enforced speed limits, many more people will be encouraged to stay in the outskirts, then he can destroy as many houses as catches his fancy in order to regain the masterplan.

In the meantime, I'm sure this article will be used as underlay in the dog kernels in El-Rufai's compound, of course unread!

Kolade writes from Plot 661/4 Yauri Close, Garki II Abuja and can be reached at: topsyfash@yahoo.com



YOUR LETTERS

Re: Senators who want to be governors

The above analysis which featured in the *Daily Trust* edition of March 18th 2005 in the *Inside Politics* page by Isa Sanusi contains factual errors about Senator Abu Ibrahim such as that his people are clamouring for him to contest for Governorship of Katsina state come 2007 under the banner of the ANPP. The writer claimed the Senator was/and in constant touch with his people.

The writer is entitled to his opinion but not mis-informing his readers on the actual happenings at the grass-root in Katsina state.

Agreed, in terms of quality leadership, principles and sound ideological base Senator Abu Ibrahim is by far no match to the amiable Senator Mahmud Kanti Bello who carved a reputation for himself in his own passion and within the context of his own time as the stormy father of opposition of the National Assembly.

Let us draw the attention of Mallam Isa Sanusi to the fact that Daura Zone (Katsina North) which is the constituency of Kanti Bello is ripe for the leadership of state. In fact the Zone has no Governor, Minister, and Special Adviser at Federal Government level while at the State level the Zone has not produce even SEcretary to the State Government or Deputy Governor, or Principal Officer in the National Assembly (like Speaker) hence, morally or constitutionally Katsina North (Daura Zone) should now produce a Governor for the state come 2007 if the noble provision of section 14 subsection 3 and 4 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is something to go by, more so as katsina south; (Funtua Zone) has had that chance in 2003.

For the record, Katsina North (Daura Zone) was neglected by both the Federal and the state Government by way of non-completion of various projects such as Dallaje Dam (Bindawa L.G.) and Sabke Dam (Maiadua L.G) and many other similar projects of economic importance for which Senator Kanti Bello is daily pushing and lobbying his colleagues at the National Assembly . As a matter of fact throughout the state including Abu Ibrahim's Katsina south (Funtua Zone) a case of neglect of Malumfashi and Hunkuyi roads is glaring. For avoidance of doubt Sennator Bello's acceptability cut across party line in the entire state, more so his Zone that Katsina is highly marginalized by the present Government because of him and General Muhammadu Buhari.

The writer and the teaming readers of the *Daily Trust* should note that Katsina North (Daura Zone) comprising 12 local governments is ANPP because of General Muhammadu Buhari and the political support and popularity of Senator Kanti Bello who won his election by overwhelming majority in 10 local governments out of the 12 local governments

In 2003 Senator Bello sacrificed the governorship ticket to Funtua Zone out of patriotism and the spirit to move ANPP forward. But this time around Katsina North (Daura Zone) which is 80% ANPP must produce the next Governor -come 2007. In fact the people of Katsina State were also clamouring for Kanti acceptance to vie for Governorship position in order to salvage the state. For we believe he is the only person with grass-root support and in constant touch with his people who can deliver the state to the ANPP no matter which candidate P.D.P fielded, hence the mistake of the 2003 must and will not be repeated in 2007.

Senator Abu Ibrahim was kicked out of P.D.P which forced him to decamp to ANPP 11 days to Election in 2003.

To keep the records straight it is a known fact that Senator Abu Ibrahim had never won or delivered his ward not to talk of his local government (Musawa) to ANPP. As a matter of fact people in Katsina south (Funtua Zone) believed he is from Unguwar Alkali which is in the Central Zone. He is not a candidate with political base within his zone, unlike Sen. Bello who delivered his. Ingawa to ANPP as well as his Zone.

Therefore, no amount of sponsored article will, come 2007, stop or derail the good people of Katsina state from electing Senator Bello.

Kabir Bala, Katsina Youth Co-alition (KASYOC) Daura, Katsina State,

What Northern governors must do

I wish to draw the attention of northern governors to the need for them to invest heavily in education and job creation.

It baffles me always to see dirty-looking young boys roaming our streets and begging for alms. These abandoned young ones constitute social menace to our society.

Instead of the much politicised poverty alleviation schemes envisaged by most of our governors, why not create jobs for our numerous graduates?

Idris Aliyu Said, Sheikh Gumi Model Primary School, Dutsinma, Katsina State.

The hoax called Middle-Belt

Even though I am not against those calling for the 'emancipation' of Middle Belt, from the clutches of so-called Hausa-Fulani who have 'continuously marginalised' them, nevertheless, will like to offer them an advice. They should avoid portraying their forum as a religious movement with a Christian bent. In all their calls and positions they seldom tag along with their fellow 'Middle Belt' Muslim brethren or at least reflect their views at any point. It seems they only need them (Muslims) when they want satisfy their personal political goals; this is a great blunder.

Essentially,there are Muslims in Plateau, Niger, Benue [no matter how small is their population], and even most of the other areas that the so-called Forum would want include in the *dream* or is it imagination.A segmented struggle hardly sees light at the end of the tunnel and so the so-called Forum should change tack.

The above, among many other reasons, is making the Muslims in the so-called Middle Belt suspicious of the movement. This also explains why the Muslims would rather cling to the ACF and other organisations that will be fair to them as members. The earlier Middle Belt Forum looks beyond its nose the better for it and its so far unsuccessful agitation.

Sani Garba Karaye, Zaria Road, Kano.

Shouldn't Ribadu resign now?

The front page story of 1st March 2005, in your widely read newspaper credited to the Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) Mallam Nuhu Ribadu was an eye-opener.

It would appear as though Ribadu is trying to undo his records in office. However, for the Commission to failure to get anything incriminating against IBB, do we still need any other proof that the man is simply honest? Eight years after, we still remember those who deputized IBB. So, should, Ribadu not resign now? However, with or without Ribadu, EFCC or any other cog in the wheel of progress, IBB will be president of this country come 2007 Insha Allah.

Chief Folorunsho Matiluko, Abuja.

agenda 2007ng@yahoo.co.u.k.

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Opinion

2007: Between Atiku and retired soldiers

By Abubakar Mahmud

Since the heavily-disputed outcome of the Presidential Election of 2003, unhealthy trends have crept deeper into the Nigerian political fabric. The polity has been heated up in a most unnecessary and presumptuous manner. In particular, some prominent but mediocre figures from the nation's largely undemocratic past, perhaps driven by an undue fear that Vice President Atiku Abubakar might naturally succeed President Obasanjo, have been too hasty to announce themselves as presidential candidates for the 2007 election. They have since commenced their flamboyant preparations and flagged off their noisy campaigns, often paying staggering amounts for chieftaincy titles in all sorts of unlikely places.

Indeed, one of the most undesirable effects of the noisemaking that has ensued is that the news of how the nation is being governed seems to diminish in importance. The rush to electoral politicking, which derives its character from the undemocratic past, has thrown up a great deal of human flotsam and jetsam as aspirants for the highest elective office of the land.

In that case, it has to be remarked that the role of certain sections of the press in giving the widest publicity to every obscure element that declares intent on running for the presidential politics of 2007 is hardly in the best interest of the cause of democracy. Is it really possible that there are, at the top of the press today, people who would not care about the quality of the politician who becomes Nigeria's next elected President? Given the prevalence of military rule in the nation's political evolution and the distortions in democratic governance that have resulted, is it not time enough that the press began to exercise its freedom and its powers in favour of a shift towards having an authentic democracy with a 'full-blooded civilian' candidate for the first time?

To put the issue more clearly, can it ever be the responsibility of elements that do not possess genuine democratic credentials to lead the country out of its present plunge into undemocratic governance, *kleptocracy* and mass poverty? In any case, is it morally or professionally right for the Press to present presidential candidates to members of the public in such a way as to imply that exposing the skeletons in their cupboards is no longer a necessity?

Take Babangida, to begin with. What on earth is the democratic credential that favours his candidature? Why should he rule again and again, after his undemocratic takeover in 1985? Remember when Col. Dimka, the wanted killer of Murtala Mohammed still made good his escape until his final arrest at Afikpo? This explains his tactical incompetence even at the military levels.

Another question is : where did he get the idea that after ruling Nigeria for eight years the way he did, people ought to give him another eight years to rack his brain for solutions to their problems which have since grown considerably in complexity, scope and depth?

Talking of General Muhammadu Buhari, he too is just another military man who undemocratically took over power in December 1983 from the elected government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Since then, attainment of genuine democracy in Nigeria has been far more difficult.

Buhari, like Babangida who overthrew him in 1985, was no democrat when he seized power. Thereafter he made no pretences to being a democrat. He made it perfectly understood by Nigerians that he had no intention to return the country to democratic rule.

And Marwa? The upstart former military administrator's aspiration to be President in 2007 also receives much undeserved attention in the Press these days. The Press seems to have conveniently forgotten that when he ruled Lagos he did so by decree. Did Marwa leave any enduring legacy of progress behind to qualify him for elective office? Perhaps, Governor Bola Tinubu can help us with an answer.

Actually, Marwa was alleged not to be in Lagos to provide public services. All he did was to be present at big parties, or to make donations to local clubs or communities. He was no doubt an "Owambe" administrator of sorts who knew the importance of appearing frequently on the pages of newspapers.

When after taking office Obasanjo retired him perhaps for being too deeply tainted by participation in military rule that was the right thing to do. It is hard to see him being an asset to democracy if he becomes President in 2007. But again, Marwa is a creation of the media and continues as such.

That leaves us with the Vice President, Atiku Abubakar. And so, the question is: What kind of presidential material is he? To be frank, Atiku is one of the presidential aspirants being presented by the Press today, whose antecedents do not portend ill for the continuance of democracy in this country. Not only is he a thoroughbred civilian; he has also been very consistent in struggling for political power only through contesting elections.

He always waits patiently for his own time to come. It is this humility in his natural character that accounts for his continuing loyalty to President Obasanjo. Forget about the media hype that Obasanjo and Atiku are at loggerheads. It is intriguing that at no time have any of those newspaper or magazine reports been confirmed. Instead, in every instance, both men have continued to work together.

Be that as it may, it is quite instructive that Atiku did not become Vice President by conspiracy, intrigue or scheming. It is a fact of our political history that when in 1999 some other prominent politicians were lobbying all over the place to become Obasanjo's running mate, there was nothing of the sort from Atiku. He went to his own constituency to prove his mettle, the outcome being that he won the governorship of Adamawa State. It was only afterwards that Obasanjo picked him as his running mate. And he has thus not disappointed anyone in the doing what is assigned to him.

To sum up, then, it is not really the case that there are four presidential aspirants vying on equal footing to succeed Obasanjo in 2007. The truth is that only Atiku can now be considered eligible successor for 2007. On the other hand, it is my opinion that the other three, namely Babangida, Buhari and Marwa all need first to be cleared both in terms of legal proceedings or inquires and the verdict of public opinion. Their military antecedents and the near-total absence of outstanding struggle in defence of democracy may well turn out to be their archilles heels!

Dr Mahmud writes from 3, Ahmadu Bello way, Kaduna.

Bribery: In defence of Suswam

By Ahmed I. Shekarau and Aondona Tehemba

Events of the past two weeks have really jolted the entire nation, raising much more questions than answers to the cankerworm which has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian nation-corruption. It created room for more suspicion and doubt in the minds of many Nigerians. In a nation wide radio and television broadcast on Tuesday, March 22, 2005, on the N55 million bribery scandal involving the federal ministry of education and some members of the National Assembly, President Olusegun Obasanjo also accused the Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on Appropriation, Hon. Gabriel Suswam, of receiving a bribe of N10 million from the Vice-Chancellor of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Prof. Jude Njoku during the consideration of the 2004 Budget for approval.

The N10 million, which the President said was meant to induce the House members to increase the University's budget by N150 million, was allegedly shared among Hon. Suswam, Hon. Osita Izunaso and Chairman of the House Committee on Education, Hon. (Dr.) Shehu Garba Matazu.

We are not spokesmen of Hon. Suswam. And we believe he is capable of defending himself on any allegations leveled against him.

The lawmaker has already addressed a press conference last week Thursday, denying any knowledge of the said bribe-taking. In deed, it is on the strength of his vehement denial that it has become imperative to look at some salient points in the accusation by Mr. President.

It is an unusual statement made by the President against the person of Hon. Gabriel Suswam without any iota of evidence, going by Hon. Suswam's assertion that: He was never, ever, informed of any allegation of bribe-taking Njoku or any person at all, relating to or connected with the 2004 budget or any subject whatsoever. Neither was he informed of any investigation by the EFCC, into any allegation of bribe-taking. And that he was at no time accused or interrogated in respect of the sharing of any money provided by Prof. Njoku, either with Hon. Izunaso or Hon. Matazu.

It can be inferred from the above that President Obasanjo did not afford Hon. Suswam any hearing or audience in whatever shape or form, before roundly condemning him of the grave crime of corruption and bribe-taking before and/or in the presence of the entire Nigerian populace.

It is instructive to point out here that Suswam is not the only lawmaker raising alarm over unfair treatment by the President. Although he has not come out to address a press conference as Suswam did. Sources close to the Senator Badamasi Maccido, son of His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto, said the Senator also alleged similar treatment, in a style that smacks of political victimization. And like Suswam, Senator Emmanuel Okpede was also reported to have alleged such ill-treatment. In fact, what makes the situation more suspicious is the fact that the EFCC is brandishing a report which contains testimonies purportedly made by these lawmakers, even though they claim that they were at no time invited to testify before any body. This is very curious.

Another point worth noting about the allegation is the fact that Mr. President, in the circumstance, chose to (and did, indeed) serve as both the accuser and the judge in the matter concerning Hon. Suswam.

not say that Suswam was interrogated or accosted in respect of any allegation of bribe-taking.

The allegation or insinuation that he was out of the country could be unfounded, as Hon. Suswam has insisted that he had not travel out of the country in the last one month. From the explanation by the lawmaker, it would appear that the President deliberately set out not only to presume him guilty but also confirm it to the entire nation without hearing from him. The President could have heard from Hon. Suswam either through the ICPC or EFCC or even by calling him directly to confront him with any allegation against him.

In any case, would it not appear that the President, by this action, wanted to do (and has ended up doing) the jobs he had assigned to the EFCC and ICPC?

A number of reasons have been adduced by some members of the National Assembly to explain the President's action in the matter of the bribery scandal. One is the insinuation that the Presidency may have deliberately set out to rope in the chairmen of the Appropriation Committees of the two chambers of the National Assembly. Why? Some allege that this is obviously because of the President's displeasure at the manner in which the legislators bluntly turned down his request for approval of funds for the ongoing National political Reform Conference (NPRC) holding in Abuja, as well as the insistence by the Finance and Appropriation committees of the two Houses that certain holes or anomalies noticed in the 2005 Budget be properly explained and/or corrected.

Suswam, investigations showed raised a lot of issues with the Minister of Finance and the DG Budget Office over some suspected discrepancies in the 2005 budget as regards funding of oil production and equity sharing of crude with

officials didn't take lightly.

If the above insinuations turn out to be correct, then, it would explain why Hon. Suswam (as Chairman of the House Appropriation Committee) and Senator John Azuta Mbata (the Senate Committee Chairman on Appropriation), were mentioned in the N10 million alleged bribery from the V-C of FUTO and the N55 million from the ministry of education, respectively.

As earlier observed, the report by the EFCC which Obasanjo used to indict Suswam has a lot of missing gaps which directly calls to question, its credibility and integrity. The two-page report is scanty and had little or no substance. Unlike the first report which came in 12 pages and detailed the comments of most of those involved in the N55 million bribery scam, including very junior officers like Chief Messenger in the minister of education's office, the report which allegedly indicted Suswam clearly said he had not been invited for interrogation.

EFCC in the report did not say who exactly demanded or received the N10 million from Prof. Njoku. Is it possible that all the three national lawmakers mentioned in the report-Suswam, Matazu and Izunaso would have jointly received the money?

Looking at the date of the report, it is very doubtful to insinuate that the "Hon. members" involved in the N10 million scam had traveled out of the country and therefore could not be invited when indeed Hon. Suswam said he was "busy with the budget process and had not traveled out of the country in the last four weeks."

Arising from this, it shows that Obasanjo's indictment of Suswam during the Tuesday broadcast had no bearing or correlation

dent said: "The Vice-Chancellor of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri Professor Jude E. Njoku who also provided the sum of N25 million (including N10 million to Honourable Matazu, Chairman House Committee on Education) as bribe to the House Committee on Education in the 2004 budget year is being recommende to be appropriately disciplined by the Ministry of Education in the absence of a Council and I am doing this in my capacity as Visitor to the institution based on the Report....Further investigation on the receivers of Professor Njoku's payment during the 2004 Budget confirmed Honourable Gabriel Suswam and Honourable Osita Izunaso as members who shared the bribe money with Dr. Shehu Matazu".

The President's indictment ahead of any form of investigation of the allegation leveled against Suswam by the anti-corruption agencies amounts to "Judgment before trial" and therefore falls short of the basic principle of fair hearing.

Any investigation at this moment is "fait accompli" as the ICPC and EFCC are most unlikely, from experience, to counter Mr. President, even if overwhelming evidence during investigations do not support his declaration in the broadcast.

Again, the corrupt act in which Suswam was allegedly involved was in the course of 2004 Budget preparation. Why did it take more than 15 months to "remember" sins, and only at a time N55 million was allegedly shared by some of his colleagues in the National Assembly? Why did it take this long for the president to act on this matter?

Isn't it curious that the VC of FUTO who allegedly gave the N10 million bribe was yet to be invited by the EFCC at the time of the report?

The foregoing shows

than corruption for which Obasanjo would like to humiliatesome of the young lawmakers like Hon. Suswam.

This may be intended to humiliate him (Suswam), rumoured to be nursing a gubernatorial ambition in his home state, Benue. Investigations reveal that his travails may not be unconnected with his ambition, especially as he is generally regarded as the candidate to beat within the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in his home state.

His constituency (Katsina-Ala, Ukum and Logo Federal Constituency) was the victim of military invasion in 2000 when Federal Troops under the guise of "peace keeping" burnt down Zaki-Biam, Gbeji, Anyiin, Vaase and other communities, and towns killing over two thousand people. Suswam was critical of the federal government, and especially Obasanjo at the time. Obasanjo is alleged to be vindictive.

More so, Suswam worked closely with the former Speaker of the House, Hon. Ghali Na'Abba, having coordinated Na'Abba's campaigns and the lobby group to become the speaker. Obasanjo is widely believed to regard Na'Abba, till date, as a political enemy and by extension all his associates and friends including Suswam. Even in the Tuesday broadcast, he made a vague reference to former leaders of the National Assembly whom he alleged had corruptly enriched themselves and were now living in opulence. Even though no name was mentioned, the point was never lost on any one.

The indictment therefore is seen as vengeful as it was an opportunity to "deal with Suswam" in the wake of the N55 million scam involving Osuji, Wabara and other members of the National Assembly.

Shekarau and Tehemba

Trust International

Foreign & Diplomatic

Tears for Terri: As she lies dying



Mrs. Terri Schiavo, the brain damaged woman



Mrs. Terri, when the going was going



Terri's parents Bob and Mary Schidler want her to live



Her husband, Micheal Schiavo want her dead

By Jibrin Abubakar,
Reporter Foreign

In some few hours or days the women called Terri Schiavo will die. She has been on clinical feeding tube after she sustained a severe brain damage 15 years back. The feeding tube that has been keeping Terri alive was removed eleven days ago, precisely Friday March 19. Doctors have said that unless the feeding tube is reinserted Terri will die in two weeks time.

While the clock tickles away and her death moves closer, the legal and moral battle on whether the feeding tube be reinserted or she should be allowed to die, rage on. Already the United States' three arms of government are standing against each other over the controversy.

The legislative arm, the judiciary and her husband have voted in favour of Terri's death. But her parents and the executive arm of government are struggling to win a legal battle to keep her alive.

Penultimate week, her husband, Michael Schiavo won a court case in Florida that led to the removal of the feeding tube. He said his wife is in a 'perpetual vegetative state' and should be allowed to die.

Giving the murky mud that surrounds Terri's case, the congress and president George W. Bush intervened asking the federal court to review the case. However, the federal appeals court refused to review it, just as White House spokesman, Scott McClellan said there were no "other legal options available to us".

Further dashing the survival chances of Mrs. Schiavo, Florida's senate rejected a bill that would have forced doctors to restore the feeding tube. The proposed legislation would have prohibited the denial of food and water to patients unless they had expressed their wish in writing. But the parents of Terri are continuing their legal fight to have the feeding tube keeping her alive reinserted.

Terri Schiavo's case is one of the most controversial cases before any law court in recent time. The case is extremely rare, in that similar cases like that are being decided by families and do not often land in the court system, says Sandra Johnson, a professor of law and health care ethics at the St Louis University in the United States.

The gory tale of Mrs. Schiavo began in 1990 when she collapsed. In 1998 her husband filed a petition to remove the feeding tube, triggering legal battle. In Febuary 2000, court rules to remove the feeding tube, but it was not removed. Consequent upon the 2000 court ruling, in 2003 Florida's Lower House passed Terri's law empowering the Florida's governor to order doctors to feed Mrs. Schiavo.

Unfortunately however, in 2004, Florida Supreme Court struck down the law and the case appeared before the US Supreme Court.

The recent twist began on March 18, 2005 when the Florida Court again ordered the removal of feeding tube, triggering the on-going legal controversy.

As the controversy rages, the nagging question is, what is really wrong with the person upon which the legal drama rotates? According to her doctors, 41-year-old Mrs. Schiavo has been in a "persistent vegetative state" (PVS) for some 15 years. Her husband Michael, who is her legal guardian, said that before she became incapacitated, she would never have wanted to live this way.

PVS therefore describes people with severe brain damage who are no longer in a coma. They have a normal heartbeat and can breathe independently, but their awareness of their surroundings is highly debatable.

Because of this uncertainty, PVS lies in a legally grey area. Unlike brain stem death or the heart dropping. This clearly marked the time of death.

However, her parents, Bob and Mary Schindler insist that she is not in a vegetative state and have witnessed and video taped her with eyes opened, moving her head from side-to-side and apparently responding to stimuli.

Her doctors, on the other hand, maintained that those motions are involuntary and that she has shown no sign of intellectual activity although doctors say there have been reports of people recovering from PVS, but that this probably shows, in part, how difficult it is to diagnose the condition properly.

In the heat of the moment, options are divergent on Mrs. Schiavo's life or death, people all around the world have been posting their opinion over a case that has, perhaps, no judicial precedence and thus seems to be beyond legal and political purviews.

In his view, Charles Hammonton looks at the issue from religious perspective: "the one who gave life to Terry is the only one who has the right to take it. Any human who makes this decision to put to death an innocent life is guilty of murder and the blood will be on their hands. The role of the government is to punish criminals and ...not an innocent life who is unable to speak up".

On his part, Richard Freiburghous; "the media, including the *BBC*, has consistently depicted Mrs. Schiavo as 'comatose' or 'vegetative', the truth is that she can respond to others in a variety of ways, it is illegal in the US to starve an animal to death, but humans have lesser rights".

"I find the hypocracy amazing. ..I find it sad that all the pro life groups are so selective on who they campaign to save" said Mike Oxfors...re.

On his part Nicole Cole from the United Kingdom: "I thoroughly believe that nature should take it course and let this woman die. I even go as far as saying to end her life quickly rather than let her starve to death...the next of kin knows more about a person than any government".

On whether Terri's husband decision to end his wife's life is born out of hatred or love, Phyllis Plymouth, a nurse wrote that "it is quite obvious that her husband loves his wife. Otherwise he would have just ceased to be involve."

Commentators maintain that since Terri's case perhaps transcend the powers accrued to the three arms of government, then her family decision and public opinion should be given priority. Regrettable also is that even within the micro unit of the family there exist divergent opinion. Her husband insists that she wouldn't have liked to live in this way and that her life be terminated. This posture does not go down well with the parents. On public opinion, analysts further posit that such move would have swayed legislations.

In his summary of public opinion, Terry Tham of San Jose, CA United States said that, "polls shows 70% of Americans who agree with the husband in this case, most Americans would not want to be kept alive this way".

Finally, in spite of the fact that Terri's right –to- life controversy has been reduced to a political football for the radical right wing; the question is, is it not the most elementary right of man to live, be fed and nourished regardless of the manner in which it is accomplished? Terri's case further casts doubt and exposes the weakness of the American laws. Hence, whether the feeding tube will be reinserted or she will be starved to death, is in the bowel of time!

"While the clock tickles away and her death moves closer, the legal and moral battle on whether the feeding tube be reinserted or she should be allowed to die, rage on. Already the United States' three arms of government are standing against each other over the controversy. The legislative arm, the judiciary and her husband have voted in favour of Terri's death. But her parents and the executive arm of government are struggling to win a legal battle to keep her alive"

Trust International

Middle East & Asia

Quraya seeks US clarification over Israeli settlements

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmad Quraya has urged the United States to clarify its position on Israeli settlements after apparently conflicting statements were made by top US officials.

Quraya met three members of the US Congress on Sunday in Ram Allah. In a statement, he pointed to the "impossibility of resuming negotiations on a permanent status" for the Palestinian territories if Washington accepts settlements "being put under Israeli sovereignty".

"Israel needs to be dissuaded from committing illegal acts, and only the American administration can do that," he said.

Earlier on Saturday, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in an interview with the *Washington Post* that Israeli obligations to a "settlement freeze" are being studied.

The remarks came a day after she was quoted by the Los Angeles Times as saying Israeli settlement expansion plans were against US policy and could hurt the peace process.

Quraya said Rice's statement about the Israeli plans was "not enough" and demanded Washington take a clear stance on settlements, regarded as illegal under international law.

On Friday, US ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer said "US policy is the support that the president has given for the retention by Israel of the major Israeli population centres as an outcome of negotiations".

Kurtzer was responding to a report in the Israeli Yediot Aharonot daily that quoted him as saying Washington had not made any such promise to Israel.

"Israel needs to be dissuaded from committing illegal acts, and only the American administration can do that"

The paper said Kurtzer "refuted" an Israeli claim that there was an "understanding" with Washington that in a future agreement with the Palestinians, Israel would retain sovereignty over large settlement blocs.

"I tell you that no such understandings were ever reached, and I checked the matter with Washington," the paper quoted Kurtzer as saying, attributing it to "a misunderstanding" by the office of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

But later, Kurtzer said: "This story has no basis in fact... There is no misunderstanding between our two governments. Our policy remains absolutely clear and absolutely firm and it is in black and white in a letter that the president gave to the prime minister."

Israel has interpreted Bush's letter as carte blanche to hold on to the large settlements, and on the route of the West Bank separation wall, which will include large blocs such as Ariel and Maale Adumim.

But in the Los Angeles Times, Rice criticised Israel over its plans to build 3500 housing units in Maale Adumim, east of Jerusalem.

She said those plans, revealed earlier this week, were "at odds with American policy" and that the Israeli explanations were "not really a satisfactory response".

US troops attack hospital in Iraq

US soldiers have stormed a women and children's hospital in the Iraqi city of Ramadi, a hospital director says.

Dr Ahmad Ibrahim, the assistant director of the city's paediatric hospital, told Aljazeera on Saturday that the soldiers entered the hospital on Friday after an explosion on Ramadi's main road.

The soldiers ordered medical staff and patients to leave, he said, before destroying the hospital's doors and detaining members of staff.

Ibrahim said the forces stormed an operating theatre where a doctor was carrying out caesarean surgery.

They initially ordered the doctor to leave, he said, but when she told them the mother's life was at risk they allowed her to carry out the surgery under guard.

The assistant director also said US troops raided Ramadi and Haditha general hospitals a few days ago, and questioned whether doctors had become military targets and if the raids were aimed at closing hospitals.

He also called on every "honourable Iraqi official" to immediately take action to stop such operations.

Most tsunami dead are female - *Oxfam*

More women than men were killed by the Asian tsunami, Oxfam figures from India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka suggest.

In some regions the disaster claimed four times as many women as men.

The charity says women were worst-hit because they were waiting on beaches for fishermen to return, or at home looking after children at the time.

The research comes exactly three months after the undersea earthquake caused a wave that devastated coastlines around the Indian Ocean.

Oxfam International focused their research on the Indonesian province of Aceh, the Cuddalore district of India, and took data from camps across Sri Lanka.

In four villages in Aceh Besar district only 189 of 676 survivors were female - men outnumbering women three to one.

In four villages in North Aceh district, 82 men died, compared to 284 women.

A staggering 80% of those who died in Kuala Cangkoy in North Aceh were women.

This disproportionate impact will lead to problems for years to come unless everyone working on the aid effort addresses the issue now

India suffered a similar fate with three times as many







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Trust International

World Report

Interim govt plans fresh polls in Kyrgyzstan

Plans by the interim leader of Kyrgyzstan to hold presidential elections on 26 June are "unrealistic", Europe's key security body said.

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's envoy to Kyrgyzstan, Markus Mueller, said it was too short a time to organise polls.

Interim leader Kurmanbek Bakiev proposed the date two days after President Askar Akayev was ousted.

Mr Mueller said there were too many constitutional questions outstanding.

Mr Bakiev announced his plans on Saturday in his first full news conference as acting president in the capital Bishkek.

But Mr Mueller said: "I don't believe this is realistic because it's a very short period of time. There are still a lot of questions unresolved - constitutional questions."

The envoy would not give a date when he thought elections could be held - saying developments over the next few weeks would have to be taken into account.

"If it does not become quieter, elections will just add to the instability," he said.

Mr Akayev was ousted amid large-scale demonstrations following disputed parliamentary elections.

It remains unclear where the former president is, but many observers say he is probably in Russia.

Russia says it has offered to host Mr Akayev, at his own request.

At his news conference, Mr Bakiev said the events of the last week had taken him by surprise. "It didn't enter my head that this could happen. God forbid that anyone should come to power in this way," he said.

People have lost the patience to live in poverty with no hope for any change

He declared the revolution officially over, adding that it was time for action and restoring order.

The venue of Mr Bakiev's news conference had to be switched after officials received information about an attempt to kill the interim president, his aides said.

Thousands of demonstrators supporting Mr Akayev marched towards Bishkek on Saturday, but the country's new security chief, Felix Kulov, said that they called off their protest after failing to win broad support.

The *BBC* correspondent in Bishkek, says that at his news conference, Mr Bakiev did not mention that Mr Akayev still has not relinquished control.

She adds that there appear to be two parliaments now too - the old one, apparently still in place, and a new one elected in the disputed vote that sparked the crisis in the first place.

Mr Mueller said talks with all politicians and clans would be required to sort out the constitutional problems.

Our correspondent reports that on the streets of the capital, the interim authorities do appear to be gaining control.



Kyrgyz opposition leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev is seen here in Bishkek. The United States said it would work with the new leadership in Kyrgyzstan to restore order but stopped short of withdrawing recognition from the deposed president vowing to reclaim power.

Germans want Berlin wall back

Nearly a quarter of western Germans and 12 percent of easterners want the Berlin Wall back more than 15 years after the fall of the barrier that split Germany during the Cold War, according to a new survey.

The results of the poll, published Saturday, reflected diehard animosities over high reunification costs lowering western standards of living and economic turmoil in the east.

The survey of 2,000 Germans by Berlin's Free University and pollsters Forsa found 24 percent of those living in western Germany want the Wall back double the eastern level.

In Berlin itself, 11 percent of westerners and 8 percent of easterners said "yes" when asked: "Would it be better if the Wall between East and West were still standing?"

The Berlin Wall was breached on November 9, 1989, paving the way for the unification of Communist East Germany with the West on October 3, 1990.

But billions of euros (dollars) spent rebuilding the east have failed to prop up the depressed region, which is plagued by high unemployment and a shrinking population.

The poll also found that 47 percent of the easterners agree with the statement that the West "acquired the east like a colony," while 58 percent of the westerners back the statement that "easterners tend to wallow in self-pity." *CNN.*

Schiavo's parents run out of legal options

Under increased security and fading hopes, Terri Schiavo's parents asked supporters to return home to spend Easter Sunday with their families as the couple's brain-damaged daughter went a ninth day without food or water.

Attorneys for Bob and Mary Schindler decided not to file another motion with a federal appeals court, essentially ending their effort to persuade federal judges to intervene something allowed by an extraordinary law passed by Congress.

Paul O'Donnell, a Roman Catholic Franciscan monk, said the family unsuccessfully urged Michael Schiavo to allow his wife the sacrament of communion during the holiest day of the Catholic year. She received last rites the day the feeding tube was pulled.

"This is in violation of her religious rights and freedoms and allows the governor to ... intervene," O'Donnell said Saturday, repeating the family's request that the governor take Schiavo into protective custody. "We beg you to have courage and take action."

Police brought in extra officers to block the road in front of Schiavo's hospice, citing the increased hostility and intensity of protesters.

Schiavo's parents have disputed that their daughter is in a persistent vegetative state as court-ordered doctors have determined.

Late Saturday, the Florida Supreme Court dismissed a request from the parents' attorney to have their daughter's feeding tube reinserted, turning aside an emergency petition arguing that a Pinellas County judge ignored new evidence about Schiavo's wishes and her medical condition.

At least two more appeals loomed by the state and Gov. Jeb Bush, but those challenges were before the state 2nd District Court of Appeal, which has rebuffed the governor's previous efforts in the case.

Still, protesters planned to hold a sunrise Easter Mass outside the hospice, even as the Schindlers urged them to celebrate the holiday with their families.

"Be with your children," O'Donnell told supporters. "Hold them close and cherish every moment you have with them."

Terri Schiavo was raised Roman Catholic, and her parents have made heavy use of her faith as the basis for the numerous appeals to reinsert the feeding tube.

Meanwhile, police monitored the scene from the hospice roof, patrol cars blocked each entrance and uniformed officers patrolled the grounds.

Schiavo's condition has deteriorated since her feeding tube was removed, but attorneys for each side offered distinctly different assessments.

David Gibbs III, who represents the Schindlers, said "Terri Schiavo will pass the point that she will be able to recover over this Easter weekend." Family supporters also said Terri's breathing has become increasingly labored. Another family attorney said hospice workers began giving her morphine.

But Michael Schiavo's attorney, George Felos, denied reports by the parents' attorneys that her tongue and eyes were bleeding, wracked by dehydration.

"She is resting comfortably," Felos said Saturday. "Her breathing does not appear to be shallow."

Doctors have said she would probably die within a week or two of her feeding tube being pulled, which was done after a judge sided with her husband's argument that she would not want to be kept alive artificially.

Odd World

'Parents could pick babies sex'

Couples undergoing IVF could be allowed to select the sex of their baby under proposals put forward by MPs.

A controversial Commons Science and Technology Committee report said more decisions on fertility treatment should be made by patients and their doctors.

The MPs also called for the regulator, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, to be disbanded.

And they said "taboo" research, such as implanting human cells into animals, should be considered, with regulation.

It makes a number of bold and challenging recommendations

However, the report caused a severe split among MPs on the committee, with half refusing to back its conclusions.

It said there was no "compelling evidence" to prohibit couples undergoing IVF being able to choose to have a girl or boy if that was what they felt was necessary to "balance out" their family.

Fertility expert Lord Robert Winston said he could not see issues with parents being able to choose their babies' sex, and that the numbers who would want to do so would be very small.

He told BBC Radio 4: "People will not go through IVF to choose the sex of their baby and even if they did it would not in any way, I think, damage the fabric of our society."

The MPs also suggest there should no longer be a need to consider the suitability of parents under "welfare of the child" considerations when approving couples for IVF treatment, because it is discriminatory.

Woman lives with 100 rats

A mother and her 10-year-old daughter lived several months in a filthy two-room apartment in the company of more than 100 rats, said German police.

The police were alerted to the situation after neighbours complained of a strong smell of excrement coming from the apartment.

When the renter opened her door to the police on Saturday, they were greeted by a swarm of flies.

Inside the apartment police officers found cages containing guinea pigs, rabbits and parrots, and the floors were covered in faeces.

One of the rooms, which was originally the little girl's, was inhabited by rats.

"My colleagues didn't open the door to the second room because the rats would have come running out," said police spokeswoman Petra Holzhausen, adding that veterinary specialists were currently eradicating the rodents from the apartment.

Holzhausen said the renter had clearly lost control of the situation.

"In the beginning she just kept a few rats, but they bred out of control."

The renter admitted to continuing to feed the rodents over the last six months.

Woman's hair reaches 13.8ft

A real-life Rapunzel has shown off her hair while visiting her native China - all 4.2m (13.8ft) of it. Dai Yueqin, 40, who was visiting the country from the US, has not cut her hair since she was 14 years old.

She let it all down while visiting her home town of Tong Xiang, in Zhejiang province, eastern China.

Her feat has not won her a place in the Guinness World Records, though. Thai healer Hoo Sateow's locks were measured at 5.15m (16.9ft) in 1997.

He began growing his hair in 1929, when he was 18, saying he had fallen sick after cutting it.

Hoo, from Chang Mai, only just beat his brother, Yee, whose hair measured an amazing 4.88m (16ft).

Want a recipe for happiness? *Run 262 miles*

Pondering life on his 30th birthday and finding something lacking, Dean Karnazes staggered home from a night out drinking with friends, put on his gardening shoes and went for a run. A 30-mile run. All night.

When he survived that, he set his sights on a 100-mile race. Then 135 miles. Then 199 miles. Then a marathon at the South Pole. Last summer he completed 262 miles nonstop.

"I wanted to see if I could make it 10 marathons without stopping," he said. "It took me 75 hours and the conditions were really tough; it rained for about 20 hours of that."

Now 42 and running a natural foods company in San Francisco, Karnazes has just written a book called "Ultramarathon Man: Confessions of an All-Night Runner."

He started running in kindergarten when he decided his mother was too busy looking after his new baby sister to pick him up from school, so he ran home instead. He ran in high school but gave up for over a decade through college, graduate school and into his 20s when he worked in sales for a pharmaceutical company.

"The thing that sparked it was booze," he said in an interview, joking about his conversion to a way of life that seems to have done for him what religion does for many.

"I was in a bar drinking with a bunch of friends, feeling no pain. But I was feeling pain over the course of my life, I didn't feel very satisfied with my job and my career.

Business Trust

Today's flight schedule

Albarka Air

Lagos - Abuja	07:20
	15:15
	13:00
Abuja - Lagos	8:45a.m.
	11:00
	13:15
	17:00
Maiduguri - Abuja	06:50
Abuja - Maid	17:00
Lagos - Yola	1:00 p.m
Abuja - Yola	14:30
Yola - Abuja	15.30
Yola - Lagos	4:00 p.m

Chanchangi Airlines

Lagos - Abuj	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 - CB	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	2:30pm.

Dasab Airlines

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

ADC Airline

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

Most airlines operate the same flight schedule on week days.

ICPC beams search light on ports

Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC), Justice Mustapha Akanbi has lamented the losses resulting from corrupt practices and revenue crimes in the nation's ports, saying that they appear to be massive.

Justice Akabi said that high profile corruption occurs in the nation's ports by very powerful officers.

He said this at a seminar jointly organised by the National Association of Government Approved Freight Forwarders (NAGAFF) and Maritime Communications Network which took place recently in Lagos.

Delivering a lecture entitled "corrupt practices and revenue crimes in the port industry: Challenges before the ports' industry anti-corruption and transparency monitoring units (ACTU)," the ICPC boss stressed that the nation cannot afford to tolerate such infractions and waste if it is to realise its true potentials.

The ICPC boss stressed that for the economic and democratic development of the nation, corruption and related offences in and outside government, must be reduced substantially if not eliminated completely.

According to him, the only determinant of the successes of the anti-corruption war in the ports industry is for ACTU members to resolve to resist offers that would be made to them by the corrupt to compromise their positions.

"All hands must therefore be on deck to check the negative trend by ensuring integrity and transparency in business operations of the ports industry," the ICPC boss said.

It would be recalled that to coordinate and streamline operational strategies between ACTUs operating within the country's port environment (sea and land), the ICPC has ordered for the immediate re-constitution of the port industry anti-corruption unit.

Mutual Assurance targets N2.5bn

The Managing Director of Mutual Benefit Assurance Plc, Mr Akin Ogunbiyi has said that his company targets a paid-up capital of N2.5 billion and an authorised capital of N4 billion by February 2007.

The managing director who disclosed this last week on the occasion of the listing of its 413,333,334 ordinary shares on the floor of the exchange, said the company would be investing N750 million in its head office development in the next three years.

Speaking at the event graced by the Director General of the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE), Dr Ndi Okereke-Onyuike, Ogunbiyi stated that the company in 2004 grossed a premium income of N784.4 million , profit after tax of N200.04 million and an earning share of 35 kobo.

He said this was against their 2003 position of N553.4 million, N58.9 million and 10 kobo respectively.

According to him the key success factor to its excellent record includes good corporate governance, integrity, stability and professionalism.

The further started that the company's fortunes has been helped by its qualified and highly skilled manpower, solid cognate experience and its efficient recruitment policy.

In her comments, Dr Okereke-Onyuike commended the bank for its performance, stressing that the NSE will continue to support credible companies in the capital market.

She encouraged the company to work hard in order to meet its stated vision, stressing that the future belongs to companies that are determined to succeed.



Nigerian Export-Import Bank (NEXIM) Managing Director, Alhaji Baba Yusuf Ahmed (left) and the bank's Executive Director, Mr Edet Ekere during a press conference on the operations of the bank, held in Abuja ...recently. *Pix: Felix Onigbinde.*

Shareholders want GTB, Zenith offers probed

From Bright Ewulu, *Deputy Business Editor (Lagos)*

Shareholders under the aegis of the Progressive Shareholders Association of Nigeria (PSAN) have called on the governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Professor Charles Soludo to ensure that the ongoing probe of bank offers by the apex bank is extended to banks that raised funds before the commencement of the CBN due diligence on offers.

According to the PSAN president, Mr Benson Okozie, the CBN probe should also affect banks like Guaranty Trust Bank Plc, Zenith Bank Plc and others which raised funds from the market last year for the sake of fairness and justice.

Mr Okozie said in a chat with *Business Trust,* in Lagos, said that if CBN does not investigate the offers and ensure that its findings are made public, that it will not be in the interest of the economy since all the banks are competing.

Some analysts within the capital market hold the view that it would be difficult for the CBN to investigate some of the offers since some investors who may have bought the shares of the banks concerned could have already sold out.

Some individuals insist that the investigation is very necessary despite the fact that the shares could have changed hands several times over.

But then, CBN at the inception of its ongoing probe of the offers had asked all banks, which raised funds since the consolidation exercise began to submit appropriate documents to it on the offers.

Okezie stated that it good for those offers to be scrutinised and publicised so that there will not be ill feelings among some banks whose offer proceeds were drastically reduced as a result of question's arising over the source of certain funds.

He expressed his association's support for the ongoing effort by CBN to discover the sources of the fund being raised by banks, saying that some banks are not above board hence the probe by CBN.

SEC, NSE move against fraudsters

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) have declared their determination to rid the capital market from all incidents of fraud, saying that the move was to create more confidence in the sector.

Directors-General of the two bodies Malam Musa Al-Faki and Dr Ndi Okereke-Onyuike respectively affirmed this Thursday at the launch of a new information technology protective device, trade alert in Lagos.

The event was graced by Chief Modupe Okoya-Thomas; Managing Director of Northern Nigerian Development Company (NNDC) Limited, Alhaji Aliyu Alkali; Managing Director of Zenith Bank Plc, Mr Jim Ovia; Managing Director of Standard Trust bank Plc, Mr Tony Elumelu, and other captains of industry. Dr Okereke-Oniyuike said the exchange is implementing a policy of zero-tolerance on all forms of market malpractices.

She said that the trade alert service will ensure that brokers will not be able to sell stocks belonging to investors without their knowledge, saying that all subscribers to the service would be alerted before any transaction on their shares could take place.

Al-Faki who was represented by Mrs Salamatu Suleman of SEC warned brokers who sell clients' shares without permission that they will be punished in accordance with the rules and regulations guiding the capital market.

He said that the Peterside Pasel's report has been released, and that operators are expected to abide by the report in order not to fall foul of the rules.

Alhaji Alkali who unveiled the new service said that Nigerians should obey rules and regulations, and maintain honesty and integrity in their work.



Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN), Director General, Mrs Modupe Adelaja (right) and SMEDAN's Project Coordinator, Professor Banji Oyeyinka during the agency's national seminar on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) projects held in Abuja ...recently. *Pix: Felix Onigbinde.*

Business Trust

NSE turnover drops to N12.19bn

From Bright Ewulu, *Deputy Business Editor (Lagos)*

The Nigerian Stock Exchange's (NSE) performance fell in February from a total of 1.57 billion shares valued at N14.70 billion in 69,356 deals exchanged in January to one billion shares worth N12.19 billion 79,854 deals in February.

According to the latest report by of NSE, the transactions were concentrated in the banking subsector which contributed 74.25 percent of the month's turnover.

However, the exchange's total market capitalisation closed the month at N1.969 trillion, a decrease of 3.95 percent from N2.05 trillion recorded at the end of January, even as the index dropped by 4.4 percent and closed the period at 22,775.14 lasted of the 23,844.45 it opened.

The report said that "the automobile and tyre subsector produced the highest growth (in value terms) as its market capitalisation increased from N3.083 billion in January to close at N4.164 billion in February, representing an increase of 35.03 percent.

"The growth is in part attributable to the listing of supplementary issue of R. T. Briscoe Plc. Hotel & Tourism, agriculture and agro-allied, engineering and construction grew by 6.9 percent, 5.69 percent and 1.26 percent, respectively," it stated.

On the whole, the textile subsector recorded the highest drop in market capitalisation as it moderated by 14.79 percent to close at N3.102 billion compared to N3.62 billion position in January. Also, insurance, building materials, conglomerate and packaging lost 12.67 percent, 6.56 percent, 5.65 percent and 5.57 percent respectively.

It noted that Nigerian Breweries Plc was the most capitalised stock for the period with a market capitalisation of N264.75 billion, followed by Guinness Nigeria Plc with a market capitalisation of N107.37 billion.

In the period, a total of 500 million units of A-Z national investment funds were listed on the exchange by way of memorandum quotation, bringing to nine the number of listings in this category.

Man charged with N3.5m bank fraud

A 31-year-old man, Chijioke Okeke George has been arraigned before an Igbosere Chief Magistrate Court in Lagos on allegation of conspiracy, stealing and forgery against All States Trust Bank Plc.

Specifically, in the charge number A/42/2005, the suspect was alleged to have, in company of others, now on the run, on February 2, 2004, at All States Trust Bank, Lagos did falsely presented himself as one Aliu Inun Adejo with intent to defraud All States Trust Bank Plc of the sum of N3.5 million.

He was also alleged to have on the same date and place and in company of others now at large forged All States Trust Bank Plc's cheque number 9599238 to the tune of N3.5 million property of the bank.

The prosecutors also told the court that "you Chijioke Okeke George and others at large on the same date, time and place at the aforementioned magisterial district stole the sum of N3.5 million property of All States Trust Bank Plc."

The alleged contravenes section 467, 484 of the criminal code Cap 32 Vol. II laws Lagos state of Nigeria 1999.

The accused pleaded not guilty as charged while presiding Magistrate, Chief Magistrate A. O. Isaac admitted him to bail.

Obasanjo commissions Okpai power plant

From Mohammed Shosanya, *Correspondent (Lagos)*

As the nation groan under erratic power supply in recent times, President Olusegun Obasanjo will on Friday, April 1 this year commission an power project (IPP) in Okpai, Delta state.

The project is a brainchild of a partnership between the federal government, National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and Nigeria Agip Oil Company Limited.

The Managing Director of NAOC, Danielle Bertorelli said at a media forum at the weekend in Lagos that his company will operate and maintain the plant for 25 years after which NEPA can exercise option of taking over control.

The plant, he explained is built in a very challenging environment of virgin seasonal swams on a 400,000sq meter land and connected to the national grid at Obobi, near Onisha NEPA. Power substation by the 55km long 330kv overhead transmission line.



Mr Paschal Dozie, Chairman/CEO, Diamond Bank Limited (left) in handshake with Prof. Greet Nnanko, Chairman, ACB Bank Plc (right). Middle is Mr John Ebeku, Managing Director of ACB, at its completion board meeting in Lagos ...recently. Pix: Oladipupo Odunewu



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Business Trust

Maritime

Court rules on N10bn NIWA suit April 21

from Adelanwa Bamgboye,
Correspondent (Lagos)

A Federal High Court sitting in Port Harcourt has fixed April 21, 2005 for judgment in a N1 billion case filed by the National Inland Water Ways Authority (NIWA) against all the oil companies operating in the country.

The suit which was brought by way of originating summons arise from refusal of the oil companies (operating under the umbrella of MISCO) to honour demand notices from NIWA area offices on the grounds that they are not liable to pay for their operations and activities within the declared right of ways.

The oil companies argued that they are in partnership with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and thus, precluded from payment due to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between them and the NNPC.

Series of meetings were held and correspondence exchanged between the two parties in their relationship but all to no avail, before the matter was finally instituted before the federal High Court Port Harcourt.

Business Trust investigations show that the current problem is not unconnected with the occupation of the role of NIWA by some other sister parastatals and government ministries leading to a lot of role conflicts.

These sister parastatals and government ministries include the National Maritime Authority (NMA), the apex regulatory Maritime body, the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and the Ministry of Solid Minerals.

Specifically, the issues for determination before the court in the N1 billion legal battle suit Ng FH/PH/CS/322/03, are as follows: whether NIWA is entitled by virtue of section 9,11,12 and 13 and other sections of NIWA Act 1997 to levy, impose and collect charges, dues or rates for dredging, shore line utilization along the right of way of declared waterway, for obstruction of waterways through pipeline crossing and such other charges from the defendant or companies carrying out dredging, oil or shoreline related activities along the right of way in spite of the provision of section 15 of the Petroleum Drilling and Production regulations and section 11 (4) of the oil pipelines Act.

A declaration that plaintiff is entitled to the exclusion of all others to levy, impose and collect charges, dues or rates for dredging, shore line utilization and use of land for spoil dump along the right of way of declared waterways and in respect of such similar activities enumerated in section 9 of NIWA Act from defendant in accordance with section 13.

A declaration that the regulation for dues established and approved by transport minister on 16 March 1998 is the valid and applicable tariff for all the various activities carried on in or along the right of way of declared water ways, creek and Lagoon and is binding on all persons and companies carrying out such activities in or along the right of way of the said declared waterways, creeks and lagoons.

Judgment in favour of the plaintiff in the sum of N1,226,671,470.00 being the total unpaid accumulated dues in respect of dredging activities shoreline utilization and such other similar activities between 1997 to 2003.

Although Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) was specifically named as the defendant/respondent, it has been agreed that what ever be the outcome of this suit would be binding on all other oil companies operating under the auspices of MISCO in Nigeria.



Mr. Ben Akabueze MD, NAL Bank Plc, (middle) answering questions at the Japaul Oil and Maritime Services Investors' Forum held in Lagos. From left are, Mr. Paul Jegede, MD of Japaul and Mr. Ayorinde Thomas. *Pix: Oladipupo Odunewu*

JOMALIC charges firms on employment

All Maritime labour employers as have been charged to recruit their labour – both dock workers and seafarers – through the joint Maritime Labour Industrial Council (JOMALIC) Maritime labour pools located across the country in order to avoid legal sanctions on any organization which flouts government guidelines on Maritime labour recruitment.

The executive chairman of JOMALIC, Alhaji Tijani Ramallan, gave this warning in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, recently, during the commis-sioning of the Maritime labour pool and training complex.

He said that Maritime stakeholders need to support the federal government to achieve the objective of setting up the council.

He said that in order to put an end to the present menace of illegal recruitment, similar modern labour pool centres shall be established in Bony, Warri, Calabar, Eket, Yenogoa and Lokoja in the shortest possible time to ease the process of recruitment and for accessibility to maritime labour employers operating within those areas.

He further said that the existing pool would assist JOMALIC in eliminating the hitherto illegal and exploitative practices associated with maritime labour employment in Nigeria.

Japaul bids to exploit maritime potentials

By Hamisu Muhammad
Business reporter

The Managing Director, Japaul Oil and Maritime Services Plc. Mr. Paul Jegede has said that the decision of his company to go public and raise funds was to enable it exploit the vast opportunities untapped in the maritime sector.

Speaking at the investors' Forum held at Chelsea Hotel, Abuja, last week, and Mr. Jegede said the Maritime sector is under utilized by Nigerian Investors, the situation that brought in foreigners to manage the industry thereby bringing about capital flight.

He said "Maritime business is very crucial, wide and lucrative to the extent that it is more wise to invest in the sector than oil and gas industry."

According to him, over $1.8 billion prospect is to be made annually in the sector if managed properly by Nigerians.

Jegede said the indigenous companies that operate the Nigerian costal areas do not own up to 5 percent of the vessels operating in Nigeria.

He stated that with the equipment the company is about to acquire after the initial public offer, it will save them a lot of expenses in hiring Jetty, maintenance of vessels, etc.

"The only way to take full advantage of the various opportunities in the Maritime business is to have funds and acquire equipment" he said.



(L-R) Marcel Martin, Managing Director, Nigerian Bottling company (NBC) Plc; Yemi, Ade-John, Director Human Resources (NBC) and Yanju Olamola, Head, External Affairs (NBC) at the launching of a fact book on HIV/AIDS during the company's 2005 Health Week in Lagos.

No massive lay off in NPA - *Spokesman*

The spokesman of the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Mr. Christopher Abiodum Borha has denied media reports that the NPA has laid off 800 employees due to falsification of results.

In a press release dated 22nd March, 2005, the NPA spokesman however confirmed that the appointments of some senior officers of the organization have been determined by routine administrative performance assessment, as part of the on-going efforts to restructure the organisation.

He said that it was the recommendation of an administrative panel on cases of forged certificates which resulted in withholding the salaries of 936 staff in all the nation's seaports and headquarters, who failed to appear before the panel.

This according to him, was misconstrued by the media to mean the sacking of all those affected.

Salaries of several such staff with genuine certificates are since been restored. A similar verification exercise is scheduled to commence for all officers of the organization next month" the NPA spokesman said.

Business Trust

International

IMF praises Brazil's "impressive" economic turnaround

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) praised Brazil for an "impressive" economic transformation, while calling for additional measures to boost growth and curb poverty.

In an annual report on the Brazilian economy, IMF directors "welcomed Brazil's impressive economic achievements over the last two years."

The IMF said that the country has been on a solid recovery path since the economic crisis in 2002, with growth of 5.2 percent in 2004, and employment growing by 3.2 percent.

The policies of the administration "have led to a significant transformation of the economy, which has resulted in a strong economic recovery, income and employment gains, a declining public debt burden, and rising international reserves."

The IMF said that despite these successes, "vulnerabilities and challenges remain."

They noted that public debt was still high and sensitive to global financial turmoil.

"Moreover, directors stressed the need to persevere with structural reforms in order to boost long-term growth prospects, critical to addressing persistent poverty and inequality," the IMF report said.

The IMF said the country's financial conditions are "the best in many years," with bond rates falling sharply, reflecting increased confidence in the South American nation.

While inflation has been tamed to around 7.6 percent, the IMF "supported the central bank's emphasis on keeping inflation on a downward path, and its cautious approach in the face of sticky inflation expectations and persistently high core inflation."

The IMF called for additional measures to "promote trade openness, and enhance the efficiency of capital markets."

It also said that the current environment "provides a favourable opportunity to address structural weaknesses in the Brazilian economy and reduce poverty and inequality."

These measures may include reform of the tax system, measures to increase budget flexibility, addressing the large remaining imbalances in the pensions system and reforming the labour code "to substantially increase flexibility in labour contracts."



Imprisoned former CEO of Yukos oil company Mikhail Khodorkovsky (left) and top aide Platon Lebedev in detention. Business partners and friends of Khodorkovsky, the jailed founder of the Russian oil group Yukos, are prepared to pay back taxes which the state claims he owes.

World Bank meets Thursday to elect president

Directors will meet to elect a new World Bank president by Thursday, March 31, the multilateral lender announced.

The directors will consider neoconservative nominee Paul Wolfowitz on March 31.

The board met Thursday with US President George W. Bush's pick to exchenge "views on a number of strategic issues of importance to the Bank Group," the organization's statement said.

"The executive directors and Dr. Wolfowitz agreed that the meeting was very useful and constructive," the statement said.

"The process for the selection of the president continues," the bank said.

A source close to the European Union (EU) said Friday that Wolfowitz would meet European leaders before March 31.

Despite their reservations, Europeans appear resigned to approve the nomination of Wolfowitz, the number-two at the Pentagon and a long-time promotor of the war in Iraq.

The United States has, by informal agreement, named heads of the World Bank, while Europeans have named heads of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Ford to pump $934m into Jaguar –*Report*

Ford Motor Corporation is preparing a 500 million pound ($934.6 million) capital injection for the unit's struggling Jaguar division, The Sunday Times newspaper reported, citing a senior Jaguar source.

Earlier this month, Ford said it expected Jaguar, which has struggled to keep pace with larger rivals in the premium car sector, to report flat sales and a loss this year.

Jaguar has said it plans to end assembly operations at a plant in Britain and cut 1,150 workers, or 15 percent, of the money-losing division's workforce.

Ford's Premier Automotive Group (PAG), which includes Volvo, Aston Martin, Land Rover as well as Jaguar, reported a 2004 pre-tax loss of $740 million, a decline from a pre-tax profit of $171 million in 2003.

The decline primarily reflected unfavourable currency exchange and lower volumes at Jaguar.

Ford has projected that PAG will have a 2005 pre-tax profit of $300 million to $600 million.



One of the Boeing 777s airbone.

Khodorkovsky's friends to pay his income tax

Business partners and friends of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the jailed founder of the Russian oil group Yukos, are prepared to pay back taxes which the state claims he owes, Khordorkovsky said.

"My lawyers informed me today that my friends have decided to pay the sums that correspond to my fiscal debt, as well as those of (another partner) Platon Lebedev," Khodorkovsky said at the Moscow court where his trial is nearing an end.

The sums amount to around 54 million rubles (two million dollars).

"I demand that the court not consider this payment as recognition of my guilt or truth of the complaint by fiscal bodies," the Yukos founder stressed.

His statement was confirmed by partners in the Menatep holding group who have sought refuge in Israel Leonid Nevzlin, Mikhail Brudno and Vladimir Dubov in a statement on the Internet site of Khodorkovsky's press center.

"We are prepared to pay what Khodorkovsky and Lebedev owe in income tax under the civil action brought against them," Nevzlin said in the statement.

"Although Khodorkovsky and Lebedev have not admitted their guilt and their guilt has not been proven on any counts, we are prepared to do everything in our power to minimize the state's claims," Nevzlin added.

Khodorkovsky, once the richest man in Russia, was arrested in October 2003 and charged with tax evasion, massive fraud and money laundering.

He faces up to 20 years in jail. Lebedev, another top Yukos official, is being tried separately.

The Russian tax authorities are also claiming more than 27 billion dollars (20.8 billion euros) in unpaid taxes by Yukos.

Yukos's main asset Yuganskneftegaz went to state-run Rosneft in a controversial government auction for less that 10 billion dollars (7.72 billion euros) in October.

Yugansk alone produces as much oil as the US state of Texas, and accounted for more than 60 percent of Yukos's sales.

Many observers regard the charges against Khodorkovsky as a Kremlin-driven vendetta in retaliation for his well-financed foray into politics in opposition to President Vladimir Putin.

The Yukos founder also clashed with the state over its control of lucrative export pipelines.

Air France plans to buy Boeing 777s

Air France said Friday it plans to replace part of its aging fleet of cargo planes with Boeing Co.'s new 777 freighters, but the airline would not say whether it will become the launch customer for the proposed new airplane.

Boeing spokesman Marc Birtel confirmed that Air France is among the airlines interested in the new plane, but he also would not speculate on when the French airline might bring the airplane into its fleet.

Air France spokesman Jean-Claude Couturier said the 777 freighter is the favoured option to replace its eight Boeing 747-200s. But Air France would not comment on a report in financial daily La Tribune that the carrier is about to become Boeing's launch customer by ordering seven of the 777 freighters.

Chicago-based Boeing said in November that it would begin offering a 777 freighter to customers, aiming to put the airplane into service by the end of 2008. But the company, which makes commercial airplanes in the Seattle area, has yet to snag a launch customer that would make the new freighter program a reality.

The 777 freighter would be based on the passenger version of the long-range 777-200LR, which is scheduled to enter service in early 2006. The freighter would be able to carry 222,000 pounds of cargo up to 6,400 miles.

Rival Airbus SAS has said its new super jumbo A380 freighter will be able to carry 341,000 pounds of cargo the same distance. It's also scheduled to enter service in 2008.

Boeing's biggest freighter offering is the 747-400ER, which could carry 248,000 pounds of cargo 5,700 miles.

Analyst Richard Aboulafia with the Teal Group said a key advantage of the 777 freighter for commercial airlines such as Air France is that it has just two engines, compared with four engines for the A380 and the 747 freighters. That could be a big cost savings for an airline that doesn't need as much space as the bigger planes offer.

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, YOLA

(School of Postgraduate Studies)

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

FUTY /SPGS/83Vol.1

APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION INTO FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES 2005/2006 ACADEMIC SESSION

Applications are invited from suitably qualified candidates for admission into Full-time Postgraduate Diploma programmes, Full-time and Part-time Masters and Ph.D Degree programmes in the Federal University of Technology, Yola for the *2005/2006* Academic Session commencing **September/October 2005** in the following areas:

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(i) M.Tech. Animal Production and Management (ii) Ph.D Animal Production and Management

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c) Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management (i) PGD Forestry

(ii) PGD Wood Technology (iii) PGD Wildlife Management

(iv) M.Tech Forest Economics and Policy (FEP) (v) M.Tech Wildlife Management and Conservation (vi) Ph.D Wood Technology (vii) Ph.D Forest Resources Management

(viii) Ph.D Forest Economics and Policy (ix) Ph.D Wildlife Management & Conservation

(x) M.Tech Forest Biology and Ecology (xi) M.Tech Forest Resources Management

d) Department of Soil Science

(i) M.Tech Soil Science (ii) Ph.D Soil Science

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(i) M.Eng Fann Power and Machinery Engineering

(ii) M.Eng Soil and Water Engineering

(iii) Ph.D Farm Power and Machinery Engineering

c) Department of Chemical Engineering

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(i) Ph.D Geography

Specialization: Climatology. Transportation, Population studies and Geomorphology.

(ii) Ph.D Rural Development (iii) Ph.D Environmental Resources Management

b) Department of Building

(i) Ph.D Building

Specialization: Project Construction Management, Building Structures, Building Services and Building Maintenance.

c) Department of Urban and Regional Planning

(i) PGD Urban and Regional Planning (ii) Masters Degree in Urban and Regional Planning (MURP)

(iii) Ph.D Urban and Regional Planning

Specialization: Urban Design; Housing; Regional Development Planning; Infrastructural Development Planning, and Environmental impact Assessment (EIA).

d) Department of Surveying (i) PGD Surveying (ii) M.Tech. Surveying

4. SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

a) Department of Management Technology

(i) Masters in Business Administration (MBA)

Specialization: Accounting. Finance, General Management, Marketing, Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, Production Management/Operations Research.

(ii) Masters in Public Administration (MPA)

Specialization: Human Resources Management, Public Policy, Local Government and Administration, Programme Planning and Budgeting.

(iii) Postgraduate Diploma in Management (PGDM)

Specialization: Accountancy, Banking and Finance, Personnel and Human Resources Management, General Management, Marketing Management, Management Information System.

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M.A./Ph.D English for Specific Purposes

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(ii) M. Tech Zoology with specialization in Acquaculture and Fishery Management, Applied Entomology and Parasitology, Applied Hydrobiology and Fisheries Management.

(iii) Ph.D Botany with specialization in Plant Biosystematics & Taxonomy, Cytogenetics & Plant Breeding. (iv) Ph.D Disease and Parasitology Control. (v) Ph.D Zoology with specialization in Acquaculture & Hydrobilogy, Fishery Management and Applied Entomology and Parasitoloty.

b) **Department of Chemistry**

(i) M.Tech Analytical Chemistry (ii) M.Tech Industrial Chemistry

(iii) M.Tech Polymer Chemistry (iv) Ph.D Analytical Chemistry

(v) Ph.D Polymer Chemistry (vi) Ph.D Industrial Chemistry

Specialization: Research projects undertaken should be relevant to a specialized area of Analytical Chemistry, Polymer Chemistry and Industrial Chemistry

c) **Department of Biochemistry**

(i) M.Tech Biochemistry (ii) Ph.D Biochemistry

Specialization: Industrial Biochemistry and Biotechnology, Protein Chemistry, Human and Animal Nutrition, Toxicology and Molecular Biology.

d) Department of Geology

(i) M.Sc Applied Geophysics (ii) M.Sc Mineral Exploration

(iii) Ph.D Applied Geophysics

e) Department of Microbiology

(i) M.Tech Microbiology (ii) Ph.D Microbiology

Specialization: Environmental Microbiology, Food Microbiology, Industrial Microbiology, Applied Medical Microbiology.

f) Department of Physics

(i) M.Tech (a)Solid State Physics (General) (b) Solid State Physics with Electronics

(c) Energy Physics

(ii) M.Sc

(a) Theoretical Physics

(b) Solid State Physics (c)Geophysics

(iii) Ph.D Physics

Specialization: Solid State Physics (General), Electronics, Geophysics, Energy Physics, Medical Physics and Nonlinear Optics.

(iv) PGD Physics

Specialization: Electronics, Energy Physics, and Geophysics

g) Department of Statistics/Operations Research:

(i) M.Tech Operations Research (ii) Ph.D Operations Research

h) **Department of Mathematics and Computer Science**

(i) M.Sc Mathematics (ii) Ph.D Mathematics

(iii) Ph.D Computer Science

6. SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE EDUCATION

a) Department of Technology Education

(i) M.Tech Industrial Technology Education (ii) M.Tech Agricultural Technology Education

(iii) Ph.D Industrial Technology Education (iv) Ph.D Agricultural Technology Education

(v) Postgraduate Diploma in Technology Education (PGDTE)

b) Department of Science Education

(i) Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) (ii) M.Ed. Educational Management

(iii) M.Tech.Ed. Biology Education, Geography Education, Chemistry Education, Mathematics Education and Physics Education. (iv) Ph.D Educational Management.

7. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The following may qualify for admission into the specified postgraduate programmes:

7.1 **Postgraduate Diploma**

(a) Graduate of FUTY or any other recognized University.. (b) Holders of the Higher National Diploma (HND) with at least an upper credit pass in relevant discipline.

(c) HND holders with lower credit in relevant disciplines but with a minimum of five years relevant post qualification experience. (d) Holders of other professional qualifications which may be acceptable to the Board of the School of Postgraduate Studies and Senate of the University.

(e) In special cases candidates may be admitted after passing such tests, examinations etc., as may be prescribed by a Department/School.

7.2 **Masters Degree**

(a) Holders of First Degree of FUTY with First or Second Class Honours in relevant subjects.

(a) Holders of Equivalent qualifications from other recognized Universities.

(b) A candidate with a degree lower than Second Class Honour may be eligible if either: (i) He/She has good relevant Postgraduate Diploma with at least an Upper Credit pass, or (ii) He/She passes any prescribed qualifying Examinations for Admission.

(d) Holders of any other qualifications with or without relevant experience which are acceptable to the School of Postgraduate Studies Committee, the Board of Postgraduate Studies and the Senate.

7.3 **Doctor of Philosophy**

a) Candidates who hold Masters Degree of FUTY with GPA 3.5 (on a 5 point scale).

(b) Candidates with equivalent qualification from other recognized Universities.

(c) Candidates with any other qualifications with relevant working experience which are acceptable to the Postgraduate School Board and Senate.

7.4 **Research and Teaching Assistantship**

Research and Teaching Assistantship may be available for limited full-time Ph.D candidates in some disciplines.

8. DURATION OF PROGRAMMES

(a)**Postgraduate Diploma Programme**

(Course work and Project Report)

(i) Full-Time: 2 Semesters or 12 Calender months (ii) Part- Time: 4 Semesters or 24 Calender months

(b) **Masters Degree Programme**

(i) **Full-Time Masters Degree** by Course Work/Thesis

Minimum Duration

3 Semesters or 18 Calendar months.

Maximum Duration

6 Semesters or 36 Calendar months.

(ii) **Part- Time Masters Degree** by Course Work/Thesis

Minimum Duration

4 Semesters or 24 months. 30 months in some very specialized fields.

Maximum Duration

8 Semesters or 48 Calendar months.

(c) **Ph.D Programme**

(i) **Full-Time Students**

Minimum Duration

6 Semesters or 36 Calender months

Maximum Duration

10 Semesters or 60 Calender months

(ii) **Part- Time Students**

Minimum Duration

8 Semesters or 48 Calendar months

Maximum Duration

12 Semesters or 72 Calendar months

9. METHOD OF APPLICATION

Interested applicants for all the programmes can obtain application forms from the **SECRETARY, SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES, FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, YOLA, ADAMAWA STATE,** on payment of a non-refundable fee in cash or bank draft payable to "Federal University of Technology, Yola" through either Afribank Plc, Yola branch or Zenith Bank Plc, Yola branch as follows:

(i) Ph.D/M.Tech/M.A/M.Sc/MBA/MPA Fees - Five thousand naira (N5,000.00)

(ii) Post-Graduate Diploma - Three thousand naira (N3,000.00)

Applicants are also required to make arrangements with their previous institutions to forward two copies of their Transcript to the **Secretary, School of Postgraduate Studies, Federal University of Technology, Yola.**

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION FORMS AND CLOSING DATE

Completed Application Forms should be accompanied with two (2) self-addressed envelopes (each measuring 22.5 cm x 10 cm), (9"x4") and carrying current postage stamps to be used for the receipt of the application; and marked "PG Application for Admission." All applications should be returned to the Secretary, School of Postgraduate Studies, Federal University of Technology, Y ola on or before 30th June, 2005.

New look Wuse Market: T

When the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB) embarked on the demolition and removal of illegal structures and containers in the Wuse Market most of the traders there believed the exercise would spell nothing more than doom for the market. Today, as Anas Galadima of the Business Desk ***reports, however, many of the traders appreciate the fact that the market has been tided up to acceptable standard although they are doomed with poor sales.***

Aliyu Amte, 28, is a trader at Wuse market, Abuja. He used to sell food stuff like rice beans, yams, Irish potatoes and dry fish in his container shop at the market. Business was good for Aliyu even though, sometimes, like in every business, he did record some losses. He was optimistic that the future of his business was bright.

But on that fateful Wednesday night, officials of the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB) accompanied by about two thousand policemen stormed the market, taking strategic positions in preparation for a two-week demolition exercise of illegal structures like containers and wooden shops. Aliyu's shop was affected. It was demolished entirely. He lost all his stock in that exercise. Since that fateful day, life has not been the same for him. But life must go on. Aliyu tries to look ahead. He has since stopped thinking about the past. Aliyu now has a new trade. He sells *Okrika* (used clothes).

Unlike in the past when he had a shop in which he sold his wares, now Aliyu hawks around trying to sell the clothes to low income earners. "It's unfortunate," he said. "I used to sell food stuff in a container shop but because of the demolition which affected me, I lost my shop and goods. I cannot stay idle because I have to work to eat. That is why I decided to hawk these *okrika* just to manage. Even at that, I try to avoid being arrested by the police because when they nab you, you pay N6,000 to be free or else they will lock you up. So if I see the police I just run."

He compared his gains now and before his container was demolished and remarked. "What I make now" he added, "is not even up to the 10 per cent of what I used to make in the past."

The story is not any different from that of Sunday Ape, a young man who sells window blinds. "Times are hard now because our sales figures have dropped. We don't get many customers and as you can see (pointing towards the gate), car owners are required to pay between N50 to N300 before they enter the market. This discourages some people. Only the rich can pay that amount every time without grumbling. And these rich people are not many so, as a result, we are not making what we used to make before. I don't know whether the situation will change in future. But for now, we don't record much sales compared to what we used to make before the demolition.



Customer attendance gradually restored to normal at the now more spacious market.



Wares on display in the shops, apparently willing customers back.

Sunday, however, said he liked Wuse market's new environment now because it is less congested and it looks more beautiful. "But I am more concerned about my profit which has dropped. Or am I going to eat the beauty of the environment?," he querried.

Malam Abdullahi, who is a tailor, also complains that his daily income has dropped drastically since the demolition took place some weeks ago, forcing him to relocate to another part of the market. "We don't make much money these days," he complains, "this is because we have been displaced and our usual customers do not know where to find us. Even those who have permanent shops who were not affected by the demolition still don't record much sales because they too have lost a lot of customers.

"The number of people that come to this market these days has reduced. I'm sure they believe that if they come to the market they will not find the traders they are used to. And you know that a buyer prefers to by from a usual trader."

Even the traders who were not directly affected by the demolition exercise seem to be negatively disposed to the demolition.

Ironically, however, some traders seem to like what the officials of the AEPB have done in the market.

Franklin Nwankwo sells curtains and table spreads. "I like the demolition," he said, "although it affected me negatively, but with the whole parking space now even a pregnant woman can walk in and move freely without experiencing any discomfort from the kind of crowd that this market was known for in the past."

Franklin, however, admits that he, like the other traders, does not record high sales like he used to in the past. "I used to make more profit before demolition because, that time, we had a lot of customers who bought from us and the rent we used to pay for our shops was less. But since the demolition took place, there has been an increase in the demand for shops so the prices have gone very high and if you try to increase the prices of your goods the customers will run away."

Franklin, though not happy about the drop in sales figures, believes that the environment should be clean and decent. He believes that people should be able to pass freely without the usual congestion characteristic of the pre-demolition Wuse market.

Franklin is not the only one who holds this opinion.

raders decry poor sales



One of the new parking lots at the new look Wuse market.

Ikenna Obi, another trader who sells clothes, also believes that the market should look decent. "In the past," explained Ikenna, "big men hardly enter this market. But now they do come in to buy things because the environment is not as



rowdy and congested as it was.

"So I like the way the market looks now. The environment is neat and anybody coming from any part of the world can come in and shop in this market. This is not how it was before the demolition."

Ikenna believes that Abuja is the only city that Nigeria can present as a pride to other counties. So it should not be allowed to turn into another Lagos.

When confronted for his comments, Segun Ayodele who sells textile materials, reacted furiously. "Why should any normal human being say he likes what has happened in this market"? "What do they like about the demolition?" he queried.

Segun believes that the affected traders were put in a pathetic state but they later even became better of. This, according to him, is because some of the traders who were affected are retailers who buy in bulk from wholesalers within the market. These whole sellers, he said, no longer get much patronage due to the fact that their customers, who are retailers most of whom owned container shops that were demolished, are no longer in business.

Cyril Igwe, is one of such wholesalers who used to sell to container owing retailers who in turn sell to consumers.

"The demolition has affected my business indirectly," said Cyril, who sells consumer goods like toilletteries, food drink biscuit and chewing gum.

"Although my shop is a legal structure and it was not demolished, my sales record has dropped. As a wholesaler, most of my customers are retailers within this same market who used to come and buy from me to re-sell to consumers.

"Now, because of this demolition, most of the retailers who used to buy from me have been chased out and their shops demolished. So my sales turnover has reduced drastically."

While many of the traders have different stories to tell, others simply chose to remain silent about the current market situation. They probably believe that it is fruitless talking about it since there is very little they can do about the current situation. Michael Bolaji, observed, "there is no need to cry over a spilled milk, "what has happened has happened and people think it is over. But we in the market know that it is not over because we are still trailed by the after effects of the demolition.

"Before the demolition exercise took place," Michael, who sells traditional women attires explains, "I used to make a lot of money. I sell Ashoke and Buba some times I make up to N250,000 in one day. But today, as I am talking to you right now, the time is already 3:30 p.m. the day is gradually coming to an en and I have not made more than N25,000. So far, only three people out of the numerous people that came into my shop today, bought something from me.

"Most of my customers don't know that I arm here. My former shop was a container which has been destroyed. This shop I use now, as you can see, is a half-shop which was rented out to me by the owner. I paid N200,000 for the shop. If the market situation continues like this how can I make my profit"? he queried pathetically.

When confronted with the question that N25,000 in a day is not a bad sales figure compared to that of other traders who make far less than this amount, Michael was quick to point out that "the N25,000 is not for the profit. That is just the overall turnover. Out of that my profit will not be more than N2,000."

"You see the profit level is very low because we have to do it like that to attract customers. If you want to make much money from every item you sell your prices will have to be high but that will scare your customers away. Competition is tight so you have to bring prices down."

Michael believes that there are over 30 people that sell the same things he sells. These people, he believes are probably experiencing the same changes..

In the light of low turnover and profit in the post-demolition Wuse market, what is the way forward? Malam Musa Jibiya believes that things will change with time.

He opined that most traders have been displaced and the market has a different look so customers find it hard to locate the usual traders from whom they buy their needed commodities that is why they don't come to the market, in large numbers like they used to.

But Joseph Bala, who sells bottled water which has a contrary belief. According to him, "things may never be the same again because, since the demolition exercise, there has been a multiplication of markets within the Abuja city centre has reduced the influx of people to the Wuse market.

"But I may be wrong," he was quick to add. "There are millions of people in Abuja. So with time, things may come back to normal. I pray for things to come back to normal because, my brother, 'things no easy."


Commercial activities simmering back to nromal at the market.

IT World

World tech expo to attract 15m visitors

The 21st century's first World Exposition opened in Japan with governments and companies showcasing technology and culture in a six-month event expected to draw 15 million visitors.

Humanoid robots walked, danced and played music alongside real humans who carried flags of 121 countries on a stage in Japan's industrial heartland of Aichi some 250 kilometers (155 miles) west of Tokyo.

"I hope this exposition will become the starting point for us to think about coexistence of humans and nature," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told more than 2,000 invited guests at the forest park, which will open to the general public Friday.

"The key to make environmental protection compatible with economic development is technology. By managing to promote both environmental protection and economic prosperity, we must pass on this beautiful Earth to our children," Koizumi said.

The theme of the latest Expo, which traces its roots to the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, is "Nature's Wisdom" with 121 countries hosting displays meant to show the link between technology and the environment.

The six-month event is expected to draw some 15 million people with exhibits on everything from advanced robots to a frozen mammoth dug up in Siberia, with the host country hoping to regain its image as a world innovator.

Heads of state or government, including French President Jacques Chirac, Australian Prime Minister John Howard and Central American leaders, are due to visit the fair to promote their countries.

The event has been dubbed the "Toyota Expo" as it takes place in the base of the automaker, which is Japan's largest company and will entertain guests at its pavilion with robots performing everything from a brass ensemble to hip-hop.

Japan readied for the Expo by opening last month its third international airport, Centrair, as a gateway.

Flags of the participating countries and four international organizations were carried in a march on the Expo Dome main stage of the venue to the sounds of a symphony orchestra comprised of musicians from around the world.

Japanese modern dancers and traditional actors of Noh plays performed for the ceremony, while children acted out skits with a message to protect the environment.



Yahoo! Co-founders, Jerry Yang (centre) and David Filo (right) pose with chief executive Terry Semel in front of the NASDAQ MarketSite in Times Square in New York after ringing the opening bell at NASDAQ on March 2, 2005 as part of ceremonies marking the 10th anniversary of the web site.

Yahoo expands e-mail storage

Yahoo Incorporation is quadrupling the amount of storage provided with its free e-mail accounts and upgrading its desktop search software in its ongoing duel with rivals Google Inc. and Microsoft Corporation.

Yahoo said late Tuesday that it will provide 1 gigabyte of storage for each free e-mail account. The current limit is 250 megabytes. The expanded storage will be available in mid-April, said Brad Garlinghouse, Yahoo's vice president of communications products.

The Sunnyvale-based company also is expanding the reach of its desktop software, a test product designed to find material stored on computer hard drives. Yahoo's software, licensed from X1 Technologies, will now index content from e-mail address books and discussions in Yahoo's instant messaging service.

The expanded e-mail storage enables Yahoo to catch up with online search engine leader Google, which offers an invitation-only service that has been offering 1 gigabyte of storage for nearly a year.

Briefs

New PlayStation

Sony Corporation has revealed new PlayStation Portable which is reserved as the most hyped of pop culture products.

What remains to be seen is whether the handheld entertainment system can live up to consumer expectations - and whether Sony has manufactured enough to meet demand.

Sony had stocked North American retailers with 1 million units for Thursday's launch, and many stores scheduled midnight hours to meet demand from gamers, the company said Wednesday.

Sony hopes the sleek, portable system - which allows users to play games, view movies and pictures and listen to digital audio - will transcend the traditional young, male gaming demographic.

Both storefront and online retailers have taken pre-orders for the system since it was announced in September. And Sony has sold more than 1.2 million units in Japan since the system's launch there on Dec. 12.

"We will have 1 million units on store shelves starting tonight at midnight, and expect them to sell those units very quickly," said Sony spokesman Patrick Seybold. "We have additional supplies, even if the initial units are sold out on the first day."

By the middle of the year, the company plans to increase production to 2 million units per month.

Retailers saw similar demand when Nintendo $150 dual-screen handheld hit the U.S. market in November, selling out its initial 2 million units worldwide.

PC servers

Dell Incorporated, the world's largest personal computer maker, introduced two low-priced server computers as it seeks to convince wary customers that networks of PC-style machines can handle tasks generally reserved for much bigger ones.

Dell, which mainly sells its PCs to businesses, has had mixed success convincing corporations to use its products to run key programs such as massive databases from Oracle and services to maintain networks of machines.

"Those are all vastly improved areas where we may have been criticized in the past," Jeff Clarke, senior vice president of Dell's Enterprise Product Group, said in a phone interview.

"The data center is the next opportunity for our company."

Computer makers of all levels for years have been developing low-cost machines that can be networked together and in tandem handle such major tasks.

One analyst said Dell had succeeded in preparing easy setup for the machines, the PowerEdge 6800 and 6850, which each can have up to four Intel Corp. chips.

"They've figured out how to package pre-tested database (systems)," said Joe Clabby, an analyst with industry research firm Summit Strategies who is based in Yarmouth, Maine.

Dell also introduced a new version of its OpenManage system management software to control networks of computers, such as upgrading software across many machines and monitoring performance.

Major competitors include International Business Machines Corporations. or Hewlett-Packard Co. , and Sun Microsystems Incorporated.

The PowerEdge 6850 server, priced at $4,899, is designed to run major Oracle database installations. The 6800, priced at $3,999, is for customers aiming to lower costs by consolidating multiple machines onto a single server, Clarke said.

LG to invest $2.2bn on R&D

From Zakariayya Adaramola, *Correspondent, Lagos with Agency report*

LG Electronics has revealed that it is planning to invest more than $2.2 billion in the research and development of new concepts and products in 2005.

Revealing this in Seoul, Korean recently, David Park, head of the overseas sales and marketing of LG, said a lot of research and discussions have been put into the development of all LG products.

He said, "We don't just put two things together and say we have a new product. A lot of research and discussions have been put into the development of our conveyance products.

By focussing on developing and maintaining technological leadership and catering to the needs of the customers to enhance the life-styles, we believe we can separate ourselves from the competition and firmly establish the LG name in the consumers minds as an attractive must have brand."

He revealed that the company also operates designs research centres in five major cities around the world to respond to changing trends.

The research centres, he said, are in New York, Tokyo, Milan, Beijing and Seoul.

He said LG's new brand of appliances has broken the boundaries of the traditional 'white gods' with the convenience of different functions and technologies. "The line up of appliances with built in TV or internets connections have gained worldwide acclaim and serve as a flash ship to showcasing LG's technological prowess. Customers can now download cooking instructions or pre-programmed washing instructions straight off the refrigerator or the washing machine."

He explained that the effort to give more convenience to customers extends to other household products, adding that the combination coffee maker oven, the internet-enabled oven, and the toaster oven are all igneous creations that have not set a global trend.

Zinox takes services to Gambia

Zinox Computers has recently launched e-government services at the GRTS building complex, in Gambia as part of the country's e-government project. Among other things include delivering first class public services, increasing citizen participation, and streamlining public services in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

A statement made available to *IT World* in Lagos stated that in his opening remarks the President of Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, represented by Vice President, Nije Saidy, said the occasion marks a very significant event in socio-economic development of the country since it is one of Mrs. Njie Saidy most historical events in recent times for the people of the republic of the Gambia.

He commended Zinox for synchronizing her arrival with launching of the e-government. .

"The government is pleased to bring information technology to the door steps of Gambian irrespective of age, tribe, colour political affiliation or creed", he added, noting t the emergence of the new information age plays an-important role in the socio-economic development of the country.

The President noted that the effective use of ICT becoming the most critical factor for rapid economic growth, wealth creation and for improving the socio-economic wellbeing of Africans.

"At the national level, my government is determined to ensure, with the support of Zinox t all Gambians have equal access to reliable and affordable information and communication technology", President Jammeh declared.

He further indicated that government would continue to adopt legislation, policies (human resource programs that will assist Gambians to become key players in the information age. He once again applauded Zinox for this timely partnership and said he was look forward to the "computerize Gambia project" modeled after the very successful compute Nigeria project.

"The government of The Gambia and her partners has drawn up an ambitious programme ensure timely implementation of these objectives. The e-government programme will demonstrate to Gambians how ICT can improve the quality of life, streamline public administration and promote economic ac l ivity", concluded.

In his response; the managing director of Zinox computers; Mr. Amasike Emeionye, who led the high-powered delegation; thanked the people of The Gambia for their hospitality. He promised them that in a very short while from now Zinox will be setting up a State-Of-The-Art assembly plant in The Gambia; employing several hundreds of Gambians and will positron The Gambia in the archives of digital history.

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IT World

Silicon valley adding few jobs - Report

By Hamisu Muhammad, *Business reporter with agency report*

Silicon Valley seems to be clawing its way out from the bottom of the jobless pit, but so slowly that it's barely noticeable.

Employers in Santa Clara and San Benito counties added 6,400 jobs in February, for the largest January-to-February gain since 2000, according to a report released Friday by the state.

But economists prefer to look at year-over-year numbers rather than month-to-month, which are not seasonally adjusted. By that measure, the area has lost 2,600 jobs-a minimal decline, they say, and an encouraging sign that the job market has bottomed out. And they're optimistic the region's employment picture will modestly improve this year.

The report for February points to an uptick in a variety of sectors, from health care to high tech. There were more jobs in electronic computer and semiconductor manufacturing, software publishing and Internet services than there were a year ago. However, those gains were more than offset by a year-over-year loss of jobs in areas like food services, retail trade, local government and computer systems design.

The difficulty is the engineering openings here are for applicants with at least five years of experience, something this entry-level candidate lacks.

"People keep saying, 'Just wait for one more month.' But there's nothing improving in the past two months, so I don't expect it to improve in the next coming months.

"It's kind of disappointing."

Silicon Valley is still lagging behind most of the rest of the Bay Area, which had thousands more jobs in February than a year ago. Economists predict Silicon Valley will continue trailing the rest of the Bay Area, state and country in employment as the economy improves.

In a seasonally adjusted survey, state non-farm jobs were up by 27,600 from January and 234,500 from a year ago. The state's unemployment rate held steady at 5.8 percent from January to February.



The new Sony portable playstation.

IBM offers VMware

Hoping to inspire more enthusiasm among corporate and smaller users alike for virtualization technology, VMware signed a deal to bundle evaluation copies of its entire virtual infrastructure software line with all IBM Intel-based eServer BladeCenter servers.

Under the terms of the deal, corporate users buying any BladeCenter server get evaluation copies of VMware's suite that are good for six months. At the end of that period, users can decide whether to buy or not to buy the suite, which includes VMware ESX Server, VMware Virtual SMP, and VMware VirtualCenter with VMotion.

"What we found is that people who use it [VMware's suite of virtual products], appear to have a propensity to deploy it. This is something that IBM and VMWare are doing jointly because we have found that in working with IBM over the past four years, there is a high degree of synergy between blade server users and virtualization users," said Brian Byun, VMware's vice president of alliances.

Users will have the right to deploy the evaluation products on as many as two blade servers, according to Byun.

The combination of BladeCenter servers running VMware's products is intended to allow corporate users to virtualize server platforms on which to deploy their mission critical applications and Web-based services, thereby lowering cost of ownership through reducing the size and complexity of their IT infrastructure, according to spokespeople for both companies.

On IBM's Intel-based servers, VMware already provides the partitioning technology for IBM's Virtualization Engine technology, which makes consolidating workloads from existing higher-end servers onto less expensive servers easier, company officials claim.

IBM officials believe the real value of the deal to users will be that VMware's products will work well with the management software they already include with each blade server, namely the IBM Director.

VMware ESX Server is responsible for partitioning, consolidating, and managing computing resources, while Virtual SMP lets virtual machines span multiple physical processors. VMware VirtualCenter provides a central point of control for virtual computing resources, and VMotion technology enables live virtual machines to be migrated to achieve more dynamic load balancing.

Oracle, SAP raise offers for Retek

The bidding war for software maker Retek flared up Thursday as Oracle raised its bid 25 percent in response to a move by German rival SAP to seal the deal.

Early in the day, SAP had sweetened its offer for Minneapolis-based Retek by 29 percent to about $640 million. Retek, which makes software used by retailers, said its board recommended shareholders approve SAP's $11-a-share offer. But Retek shares soared past $11, a sign investors expected Oracle to respond with yet a higher price.

Oracle did so Thursday evening with an $11.25-a-share offer that values Retek at $655 million.

SAP and Retek announced Feb. 28 that SAP would acquire Retek for $8.50 a share. On March 8, Oracle bested that with an unsolicited cash offer of $9 a share.

The fight for Retek is shaping up as a slugfest between two software-industry giants for what they each see as a strategic prize.

Oracle, based in Redwood Shores, did not respond to requests for comment Thursday.

Oracle purchased a 10 percent stake in Retek this month for $48.5 million before making its surprise offer.

Before Oracle made its latest offer Thursday evening, SAP said the $11 bid would be its "best and final offer."

"We believe that SAP's offer is a good deal for Retek stockholders, and our board of directors has unanimously recommended that it be accepted," Retek President and Chief Executive Marty Leestma said in a statement Thursday before Oracle made its new bid.

Before Oracle's offer, shares of Retek had surged $1.13, or 10.7 percent, to close at $11.65.

Oracle CEO Larry Ellison said his company had been in talks to buy Retek last year, but those efforts were sidetracked by Oracle's recent acquisition of PeopleSoft, a Pleasanton maker of applications software.

Oracle, the world's largest seller of database software, is increasing its competition with SAP in the market for business applications, which run atop databases and manage operations including finance and human resources.

Retek has about 525 employees and had sales of $174.2 million in 2004. SAP and Oracle have said selling software tailored to retailers is a market segment with high growth potential.

In its new offer, SAP also increased the termination fee -the penalty to break off the deal -from $15 million to $25 million, which would raise Oracle's cost of buying Retek by $10 million.

Tad W. Piper, a senior analyst with Piper Jaffray, said SAP's offering of software applications used by retailers is broader than Oracle's. He added that SAP and Oracle are willing to pay a premium to gain access to Retek's 200 customers, which include Gap and Best Buy, to be in a position to sell them software and services beyond those specifically designed for retailers.

Sun, Microsoft move to douse dev storm

In separate efforts, Sun Microsystems and Microsoft are taking steps to try to satisfy developers irked with the vendors' recent policy decisions pertaining to application development.

For Sun, the company has conjured up new license plans for Java intended to satisfy developers who want an all-out open source Java while Sun strives to maintain compatibility within the language. Sun also has been flying the flag of its new JavaServer Faces (JSF) technology for Web application development within Java, seeking to have it become the standard. But not all are impressed.

Microsoft, meanwhile, has been holding to its stance that it will cease paid support for its Visual Basic 6.0 programming language at the end of March, no matter how many developers sign an online petition seeking a commitment to the language. Thousands have signed the petition so far.

Sun has been pelted with calls to make Java open source for roughly the past year. Competitors that have relied on Java, including IBM and BEA Systems, have been among those on the bandwagon pleading for an open source Java that would be less tied to Sun's control.

Inching in that direction, Sun last week announced two licensing schemes: the Java Internal-Use License, or JIUL, and Java Distribution License, or JDL. The JIUL license lets developers change Java source code for internal use only, but relies on users themselves to respect compatibility. The JDL is a narrowly focused effort that allows for developing deployments of Java on specific platforms.

"I think Sun's making a lot of moves in the right direction to give Java the advantage of open source without actually having to open-source it," said Java developer Joseph Ottinger, editor of TheServerSide.Com, an online community for enterprise Java developers.

Open source provides the advantage of a contributing user community, but full-blown open source also could result in versions of Java that are not in synch with the official platform, reducing the quality of the Java brand, Ottinger said. "The biggest danger, from Sun's perspective, is that some major vendor would release an incompatible Java," said Ottinger.

'Tech spending may remain low'

Companies remain cautious about spending on technology, and only marginal increases are expected for the rest of 2005, a survey of technology decision makers said on Friday.

"We continue to expect 2005 information technology spending to end up in the 4 percent to 5 percent range. This is slightly higher than last year, but still not reflective of a fully healthy tech spending environment," Goldman said.

In the report, Goldman surveyed some 100 information technology managers with decision-making power at Fortune 1000 companies.

Security software and hardware, high-end storage systems, Web server software and laptop computers are expected to draw higher interest over the next 12 months.

Symantec unveils hosted e-mail security

Information security firm Symantec has rolled out Symantec Hosted Mail Security, a service designed to provide protection against spam, viruses and unwanted content in enterprise environments.

The service is the third piece in the company's Mail Security product line, which also includes server software and preconfigured appliances.

Included in the hosted service are policy-based filtering controls for attachment blocking, subject and message body filtering, and encrypted file handling.

Symantec noted that the content-compliance functionality will assist organizations in following regulatory compliance.

The creation of the hosted service was done partially as part of Symantec's desire to provide more security options for customers. But it was developed also in response to customer requests, according to Chris Miller, Symantec group product manager.

"It's been very interesting, the way that this was developed," he said. "Like we do with other products, we approached our customers to find out what they would think about having this in the market. But we also had a number of people come knocking on our door, asking when we'd develop a hosted solution."

COMPUTER TRAINING
*Computer Application
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BVS Computer Training School
Suite FF14, Plot 2009
Noble Complex
Area 10, Garki Abuja
Tel: 09-2343517, 08023214306
email:bvscomputers@yahoo.com

OURS IS A HOUSE OF HONOUR AND INTEGRITY



On Tuesday, 22nd March 2005, the president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo made a broadcast to the nation during which he leveled serious allegations of official corruption against the president of the Senate, Some Senators and three members of the House of Representatives – an allegation which all decent and well meaning Nigerians will justifiably be concerned about.

The House, this morning (Wednesday, 23rd March 2005) equally received communications from Mr. President of the subject matter- which it has referred to the committee on ethics and privileges in accordance with the Standing orders of the House of Representatives, Federal Republic of Nigeria. The said committee is to report back to the House in two weeks.

The House of Representatives has so far conducted itself with integrity , credibility, honour, candour and respectability. This House on it own volition enacted a Code of Conduct for its members because it believes members should be above board.

This House has been in the Vanguard of the fight against corruption. In this wise, the House of Representatives has conducted investigations into the following matters and is considering reports namely:

* Bureau of PUBLIC ENTERPRISES/NITEL/PENTASCOPE
* The case of Missing Ship (Mv African Pride)
* Ajaokuta Steel Comp. Ltd/SOLGAS
* Military Pension Board
* National Housing Fund
* Privatisation Share Purchase Loan Scheme Fund
* National Identity Card Corruption Scam
* The Halliburton Case
* The former IGP Tafa Balogun Corruption Saga

The House also passed the EFCC Establishment Act 2004: ICPC and related Offences Act and the Various amendments; and Money Laundering prohibition Bill among others.

While we share Mr. President anxiety over the issue of corruption, we caution that oversweeping comments like that contained in Mr. President's national broadcast has very serious implication for our democracy.

The war against corruption should not be against the National Assembly as an institution but against any identifiable individual after conclusive investigations and fair hearing. The power of adjudication in criminal trials as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is specifically conferred on the judiciary – not the Legislature and not the Executive by Television trial and conviction.

THE HOUSE WILL NOT BE INTIMIDATED IN THE PURSUIT OF ITS CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF LAW MAKING AND CARRYING OUT ITS OVERSIGHT FUNCTION OVER THE EXECUTIVE AND OTHER ARMS OF GOVERNMENT SECTION 4 AND 88 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA ARE VERY CLEAR ON THIS MATTER.

We will continue to collectively defend the integrity of this Nation and work as a respected House of Representatives that will be a pride of all. Democracy is a journey, not a destination. It is a complex learning curve , which requires serious commitment from all stakeholders , so that collectively we can journey towards the goal.

Thank you
Signed

Hon. ***Abdul Ningi (House Leader)***
Hon. ***Datti Baba Ahmed***
Hon. ***Depo Oyedokun***
Hon. ***Abike- Dabiri***
Hon. ***Halims Agoda***
Hon. ***West Idahosa***
Hon. ***Ita Enang***
Hon. ***Abdullahi Idris***
Hon. ***Bala NaAllah***
Hon. ***Dave Salako***
Hon. ***Alex Nwofe***
Hon. ***Mercy Alumona Isie***
Hon. ***Wunmi Bewaji***
Hon. ***Mohammed Kumallia***

KEBBI STATE TENDERS BOARD
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
BIRNIN KEBBI

Invitation to Tender

The Kebbi state government is desirous to embark on the **CONSTRUCTION OF ALIERO TOWNSHIP ROADS (PHASE II)**

Reputable and Registered firms are invited to inspect the road at **ALIERO TOWN** and collect Tender documents from the secretary Kebbi state Tenders Board Cabinet Office B/Kebbi as from the date of this advertisement on payment of Non refundable tender registration and processing fees.

The Completed Tender Documents should be sealed signed in a separate envelop marked **CONFIDENTIAL** and return to this office not later the two (2) weeks from the date of this advertisement.

Signed
Abdullahi T. Yeldu
Secretary
Kebbi State Tenders Board
Birnin Kebbi

Invitation for Bids

NIGERIA
LOCAL EMPOWERMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PROJECT

COMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT (V-SAT)

Credit No 3818 UNI
Issuance Date: 28th March 2005

1. This invitation for bids follows the general procurement notice for this project that appeared in dg Market of 27th May 2004

2. The federal government of Nigeria has received a credit loan from, the International Development Association toward the cost of the Local Empowerment and Environmental Management project, and it intends to apply part of the proceeds of this credit to payments under the contract for supply of communication Equipment **(V-SAT) LEEMP/BA/NCB/002.**

3. The Bauchi state project Support unit now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the supply of the items listed below

Item	Description	Quantity	Delivery period	Delivery location
1.	Provision and Development of KU-band VSAT, solution with following specification **a.** Uplink Data Rate: 64 Kbps (Kilobits per seconds) **b.** Download Data rate: 128 kbps **c.** Type of Bandwidth: Dedicated (i.e. not shared	1	60 days	State project Support Unit. No.4 Yandoka Road Bauchi

4. Bidding will be conducted through the National Competitive Bidding procedures specified in the World Banks Guidelines: Procurement under IBRD Loan and IDA credit, and is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the Guidelines.

5. interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from the coordinator and inspect the bidding documents at the address given below from 8 am to 4 pm Mondays to Fridays.

6. A complete set of bidding documents in English may be purchased by interested bidders on the submission of a written application to the addresses below and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of ten thousand naira (**N10,000**). The method of payment will be cash, certified check or Bank draft. The document will be sent by courier or collect by hand.

7. Bids must be delivered to the address below on or before 12 noon on 28th April 2005. All bids must be accompanied by a bid security of at least 3% of bid price or an equivalent amount in a free convertible currency. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be opened in the presence of the bidders' representatives who choose to attend at the address below at 12:15 pm on 28th April 2005.

The coordinator,
State Project Support Unit,
Local Empowerment and Environmental Management project,
No 4 Yandoka Road Bauchi, Bauchi State
Nigeria
Tel: 077-542721
E-mail: bauchileemp@yahoo.com

To our esteemed Readers and Advertisers

Advertorials, petitions and related materials in *Weekly & Daily Trust* Newspapers

Media Trust, publishers of *Weekly and Daily Trust* take very seriously, its responsibility to the public to publish all points of view, including those we do not share. We think this is the function of an independent, liberal newspaper dedicated to the pursuit of the common good. We are also conscious of the fact that it is a shortsighted business policy for a newspaper to shut out a particular point of view for its own reason or due to pressure from powerful institutions and advertisers.

But we are also aware that professional agitators can use the pages of newspapers to malign governments, companies and individuals on spurious grounds.

Caught between our desire to give voice to the concerns of the voiceless and to protect public and institutions from unfair and demoralising attacks, we have been forced to develop a more stringent policy for the placement of advertorials, petitions and other related materials in the pages of our newspapers.

The new policy is as depicted hereunder:

1. The writer(s) of such advertorials must not be anonymous but people who can stand by what they say, with their full names and addresses.

2. If there is any accusation at any person or organisation, such writer(s) must substantiate the claims with evidence, which can stand before a Court of law. For example, **if they claim that a contract was inflated,** they must show Media Trust, relevant documents to back this up.

3. The placement must be fully paid for, before it is carried.

4. The author(s) should be prepared to accept corrections or alterations made by us but the corrected version would be shown to the author(s), before publishing.

5. In the alternative, we are prepared to enter into an indemnity agreement with those who place such advertorial which will put the onus of proof squarely on them.

6. The publishers have the right to reject any piece considered to be libelous, containing assertion without supporting facts and figures to prove the authenticity of such claims.

7. Media trust employees that collect such materials have been instructed to contact the advert manager, who will also consult further with the relevant superior officers to analyse the piece before placement is made.

8. If the publishers of *Daily Trust*/*Weekly Trust* reject any materials regarded as unprintable based on the above considerations, they will not enter into any correspondence with the author(s).

Finally, we wish to assure our readers that we will not shy away from publishing fair and balanced criticisms of any government or individual, which is in the nature of free exchange of ideas.

This, we will continue to do in our free opinion columns and with advertorials where some readers feel strongly enough to pay for them. We thank you for your support and assure you that we will do our best to keep your trust.

Signed:

Management.

News



President Olusegun Obasanjo recieving a sourvenier from the senior vice president ,Geographic Area Italy, Mr. Claud Descalzi assisted by the general manager public affairs of AGIP Oil, Mr. Akin Aruwajoye during their courtesy visit to the State House, Abuja...recently Pix: Joe Oroye

Rivers, Bayelsa community praises Yobe on Sharia

Rivers and Bayelsa community in Yobe have commended the government for allowing them free conduct of activities in spite of Sharia law.

The governments have enabled non-Muslims to conduct of their activities unhindered.

The community made the commendation when its President, Mr. Cyrus Nkwangwung, visited Yobe deputy governor Aliyu Bagare on Thursday in Damaturu.

He said the introduction of Sharia in the state had restored the dignity of Muslims.

Nkangwaung, said members of the community were grateful for the sense of belonging accorded the indigenes from Rivers and Bayelsa.

"We pledge our loyalty and we would support policies and programmes for the growth of the state," he said.

He called on the state government to offer employment to corps members from Rivers and Bayelsa serving in the state.

"Our sons and daughters felt so much at home here and wish to remain if given the chance," he said.

Requesting for a land to build a town hall, he said: "It is our believe that it would further attract our kinsmen to conduct their activities in a conducive environment."

The host said non-indigenes would be accorded equal treatment with indigenes irrespective of tribe, religion and political differences.

He said: "as a responsible government, we will strive to provide the environment for peace and co-existence," he said.

Islamic sect calls for true federalism

Bauchi-based Islamic sect has called for the abrogation of sections of the 1999 constitution that were inconsistent with true federalism.

This was contained in a memorandum to the political reform conference by the Bauchi local chapter of Jama'atul Izalatil Bid'ah Wa'Ikamatis Sunnah (JIBWIS).

The group said Muslims would fare better under true federalism.

The Islamic sect said as a multi-cultural and multi-religious country, Nigerians should work towards a true federal constitution.

True federalism, the sect explained, would protect religious laws made by the various constituent parts of the federation.

In order to achieve unity in diversity, it said the differences and peculiarities of the constituent federating units should be recognised.

It also called for the reduction of political appointees to minimise cost of governance.

Bribery scandal

Imo people unhappy with Osuji's sack

Indigenes of Imo state received with mixed feelings the dismissal of the Minister of Education, Prof. Fabian Osuji, over alleged corrupt practices.

A cross-section of the people, who spoke to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Owerri on Thursday, described the issues raised by President Olusegun Obasanjo in the broadcast as "shocking, surprising and disappointing".

Three prominent Imo citizens were indicted by Obasanjo in his nationwide broadcast.

They include Osuji, the Vice-Chancellor of Federal University of Technology (FUTO), Owerri, Prof. Jude Njoku and the member representing Ohaji-Egbema/Oguta/Oru West Federal Constituency in the National Assembly, Chief Osita Izunaso.

While some commended Obasanjo for taking the giant steps in punishing the alleged corrupts officers, others saw the presidential action as a move aimed at tarnishing the reputation of prominent Imo citizens.

They argued that in as much as corruption at any level should be condemned, some other persons who are not Igbos had done worst corrupt acts without being disgraced out of office.

Chief Gilbert Njoku, a political analyst said that Osuji would have escaped the ordeal if he was not Igbo.

"I do not support corruption at all. My worry is that things concerning the Igbos take a different turn in this country," Njoku said.

Citing the case of the former Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun, Njoku wondered why some tribes in the country should be treated as if they had the immunity to commit crimes.

In his reaction, a veteran journalist, Chief Damian Obika, described the dismissal of Osuji as "selective justice".

"The action clearly shows how the President regards the Igbos," Obika stated.

However, a renowned unionist, and former Chairman of Electricity and Gas Workers Union in Imo, Mr. Anthony Adizua, said that no right thinking person should support bribery and corruption, no matter how highly placed the culprit is in the society.

Adizua urged Obasanjo to carry out more investigations and fish out the "bad elements" for appropriate sanctions.

"I do not believe that the public officers who allegedly offered bribes were punished because they are Igbos," he stated and cautioned that there should be no sacred cows in the sanitization of the Nigerian society.

The Imo Commissioner for Information and Culture, Chief Chris Okewulonu, described the bribery scandal as very unfortunate.

Okewulonu agreed that the whole scandal looked as if it was targeted against Imo people, but said that the situation was sensitive.

Ekiti teachers get N7m car, housing loans

Ekiti government has disbursed N7 million as car and housing loans to teachers in public secondary schools in the state.

The Chairman of the state teaching service commission, Chief Gabriel Falayi, disclosed this to the All Nigeria Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPPS) and the Non-Academic Staff Union in Ado-Ekiti.

Falayi said a committee comprising all stakeholders in the teaching profession had been set up to supervise the disbursement of the loans to teachers.

He assured the teachers of government's continued support to make life more meaningful for them and charged them to reciprocate the gesture in order to raise the quality of education in the state.

"Government is more than ever before committed to an improved working condition for teachers and non-teachers alike in our schools.

"This also demands that teachers should reciprocate by improving on the quality of teaching to justify being the fountain of knowledge," he said.

The chairman, who said non-teaching staff would also benefit from the gesture, assured them that the loan would be distributed evenly across the state.

Responding, the ANCOPSS state Chairman, Mr. Akin Dada, commended government for its efforts to revamp the education sector and promised to give support to the teachers.

FG to establish more border posts

The federal government has pledged to establish additional border posts in the country before the end of the year.

There are at present 227 border posts throughout the country

A statement from the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued weekend in Abuja quoted the Minister of State, Malam Saidu Samaila, as stating this when he visited the Kamba border post in Kebbi.

Samaila said that the federal government had budgeted substantial fund for the year 2005 to take care of the needs of the security agencies, such as the Nigeria Immigration Service, the Nigeria Custom Service and the police, operating in the borders.

Samaila told the Immigration Officers that patrol vehicles, motor-cycles, bicycles, horses and communication gadgets would be provided for the officers to enhance their operations.

The minister also gave assurance that basic amenity, such as potable water, electricity, schools, health facilities and accommodation would be provided by the federal government at border posts for officers and their families.

He also said that the government had arranged for security agents who would be stationed at every entry and exit point at the border posts.

The minister advised officers at the border posts to work as a team to ensure the internal security of the country at all times.

"Secured environment is a necessity for direct foreign investment and for sustainable socio-economic well-being of the country," he said.

The Comptroller of Kebbi Immigration Command, Mr. Adike John, had earlier enumerated the problems of the Kamba border post to the minister.

John said that the border post lacked adequate accommodation, communication gadgets, operational vehicles, potable water, electricity, schools and health facilities.

Government spends N170bn on electricity

The Federal government spent more than N170 billion on electricity between 1999 and 2004.

The huge investment was an effort to improve power generation, distribution and transmission in the country.

Former Minister of Power and Steel, Liyal Imoke, gave the figure on Thursday at an interaction with newsmen in Okpai, Delta.

Imoke who inspected Agip power plant, said his visit was in preparation for the April 1, inauguration of the plant.

The 330 megawatts power plant when fully completed with the gas turbine before the end of the year, he said would have 480 megawatts.

The generation and the step down would cost between N600 million and N1 billion, and expressed satisfaction with work done so far.

"Twenty years of no investment under the military and low tariff contributed to the low performance of NEPA," he said.

Imoke expressed disappointment over the destruction of one of the units of the Agip Plant.



L-R: Mallam Salihu Abubakar (Amir) left discussing with Alh. Muhammed Umar Kura during the press conference on 10th annual convention by the National Islamic Centre, Zaria, held at the National Mosque Abuja...weekend Pix: Felix Onigbinde

News

Obasanjo erred on corruption —ex-minister

From Mohammed Abubakar,
Correspondent (Gombe)

The former minister of education in General Muhammadu Buhari's regime and a federal government delegate to the National Political Reform Conference, Ambassador Yerima Abdullahi, said that President Olusegun Obasanjo made a terrible mistake by not tackling corruption head-on in the past when there were similar cases he could have dealt with. Ambassador Yerima Abdullahi told *Daily Trust* that he was surprised by Mr. President's broadcast and the allegations of corruption levelled against a minister and some members of the National Assembly, including the Senate President, because similar charges were levelled against the former Inspector-General of Police and one Dr. Makanjuola, erstwhile Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence.

While agreeing that the particular case of corruption dealt with in the President's broadcast was terrible, since it involved the Senate President, the former ambassador to Malaysia and Brunei observed that the case was not unique. 'There were a number of similar cases of corruption,' he said. 'I don't know why the President chose to make a broadcast on this particular one.'

Ambassador Yerima said that corruption has thrived in this country because it has been looked at with indifference and the government has not fought it with all seriousness. He noted that Nigerians were beginning to realise the consequence of that indifference because they are embarrassed everywhere in the world and suspected of being crooks, whoever they might be. 'If we had fought corruption with all seriousness,' he remarked, 'those engaged in the activity would have been disciplined or would know that they would be disciplined.'



A cross section of the participants during the launching ceremony of the National mosque appeal fund held at the Eagles Square Abuja...recently. *Pix: Joe Oroye.*

Cholera claims 15 in Benue

Cholera, a common disease in most parts of Benue state, has claimed about 15 lives in three villages in the Apa local government area of the state.

The Apa council chairman, Hon. Samson Ocholi, could not be reached for further comment on the effect of the disease on his area, but officials of the council told *Daily Trust* that the chairman was greatly worried by the development and has made effort to check it. The Benue state Commissioner for Health, Mr. Mike Iduma, could also not be reached for comments, but *Daily Trust* gathered his ministry was fully briefed on the development.

A visit to Apa at the weekend revealed that Ikobi was the worst hit village, as not less than nine persons were said to have died of cholera infection in the last week alone. Various persons spoken to confirmed that the outbreak of the disease was spreading rapidly, and had hit two neighbouring villages of Ikobi where at least six persons were said to have died.

Minister flags off Oyo-Kwara-Benin road project

From Abdulrazaq Adebayo
Correspondent (Ilorin)

The Barutan communities in Kwara North Senatorial District rolled out their drums to mark the flag-off of the multi-billion naira Oyo state boundary-Ilesha Baruba-Kosubos Chikanda road project. The Minister of Works and Housing, Senator Adeseye Ogunlewe, flagged-off the project at the Ilesha Baruba end of the 125 kilometre road, while Governor Bukola Saraki flagged-off the Kosubosu-Chikanda section of the road amidst jubilation by the people.

Speaking at Ilesha Baruba, Senator Ogunlewe said after a rough ride to the area that he was surprised that such a road still existed in Nigeria.

Governor Bukola Saraki declared that the execution of the road project jointly financed by the state and federal governments marked the fulfilment of his election campaign promise of 15 months ago. He thanked God for using him to realise the dream of the people in the area after several unfulfilled promises by previous administrations in the past 40 years. 'We all must do what it takes to deliver this project to completion,' he added.

Governor Saraki acknowledged the respective contributions of President Olusegun Obasanjo, the state House of Assembly, Kwara state members of the National Assembly, and the Minister of Works in ensuring the fruition of the project.

In his speech, the speaker of the Kwara state House of Assembly, Hon. Isa Bio Ibrahim, commended the state government for helping forgotten communities to realise their life-long dreams.

The Kwara state Commissioner for Works and Transport, Engr. Yinusa Afolabi, described Baruten local government area as rich in mineral resources and tourist attractions, and capable of placing Kwara state on the world map. He said that bad road networks have hitherto deterred the effort to tap the rich resources of the area, hence the determination of the state government to turn the situation around and change the fortunes of the people for the better.

'As a measure to accelerate the pace of work mobilise the contractors, the plant advance fee was paid to the two contractors by the state government in the belief that the federal government would in due course reimburse the state government.'

The chairman of Baruten local government council, Alhaji Alfa Suleiman Seko, regretted that past governments had neglected the Baruten area in terms of physical infrastructure.

Senator links bribe scandal to Obasanjo

From Hir Joseph,
Correspondent (Makurdi)

The Deputy Senate Minority Leader, Senator Daniel Saror, has described the latest anti-corruption scandal in which some federal legislators were indicted for receiving a bribe of N55 million from the dismissed education minister, Prof. Fabian Osuji, as another vindictive move by President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Senator Saror, who spoke to newsmen on telephone, described the President's latest move as 'a good start at fighting corruption,' but doubted the President's sincerity. According to him, the manner in which the President went about it suggested that he was only acting on a vindictive impulse.

'I know this is a vindictive move,' said the Benue North-East Senate representative, 'he is behaving like somebody who thinks it's payback time.' Senator Saror also argued that the President had a long way to go on his avowed move against corrupt officers, pointing out that it was only when he (Obasanjo) carries the fight to his own doorstep that he would achieve a positive result.

Alleging that the President had legitimised corruption in the country, the ANPP senator challenged him (Obasanjo) to 'beam the searchlight inwards before pointing it outwards, as charity begins at home.' He said that those he referred to as the 'President's men' should be first to be probed for corrupt practices. 'We are different from the President's men,' he said, 'he should leave us alone.'

Senator Saror advised the President to point his searchlight at members of his Executive Council who have been involved in more corrupt practices in the eyes of Nigerians.' He wondered why the President sounded as though he had suddenly discovered corruption in the system.

In another telephone chat, the former Lagos state police boss and anti-corruption crusader, Alhaji Abubakar Tsav, equally called on the President to avoid discrimination in the fight against corruption. He advised the President to go all out to fight 'the monster.'

Confab: NGO urges withdrawal of Muslim delegates

From Jamilah Nuhu Musa,
Correspondent (Kano)

In view of President Olusegun Obasanjo's failure to correct religious imbalance in the representation at the National Confab, the Network for Unity, an NGO, has called for the withdrawal of Muslim delegates. In a press statement issued in Kano and signed by its national chairman, Mallam Garba Bala, the Network for Unity called on Northern state governments and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs to pull out Muslims delegates from the conference. The association expressed shock at the way the President 'received and rebuffed' eminent Muslim leaders, and re-emphasised that religion should be a basis for nomination.

According to the NGO's press release, religion 'is one of the bases of our unity.' Observing that our religious leaders 'are always preaching peace, stability, and the coexistence of Nigerians,' the statement maintained that 'inasmuch as the Network for Unity propagated national unity, it believes that without religious tolerance, fair play, and balance in appointments and nomination, unity would remain elusive.' The association therefore called on all Emirs and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs to intervene in the matter and take a drastic measure by immediately recalling the Muslim delegates.

BON to revolutionise system for excellence

From Muhammed Ajah,
Correspondent PHC

The Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON) said that it was already utilising information technology revolution to engender a better future for younger Nigerians, as well as those yet unborn. The chairman of BON and director general of Voice of Nigeria (VON), Mallam Abubakar Jijiwa, who made this declaration at the 39th General Assembly of Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria, said that the step was timely considering the image of the country. He said that BON was shifting away from routine activities to the very heart of broadcasting excellence, sustenance of high standards, equipment upgrading, and digital application.

Mallam Jijiwa, the theme of whose paper at the assembly was 'The Role of Broadcasting in the Quest for Sustainable Political Reform in Nigeria,' noted with dismay that the dearth of modern equipment, obsolescence of critical tools, and unfavourable working environment have befallen most broadcast stations. He observed that BON was committed to the Nigerian image project, which was also at the heart of the Africa project. He added that the association has also set up a committee to contribute to the new National Broadcasting Code currently being reviewed by the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). According to him, the general assembly would refresh, re-engineer, and reposition the organisation at this trying moment in the nation's history and give it a new cutting edge by ensuring a paradigm shift in the broadcasting industry aimed the attainment of professional excellence.

The Rivers State Commissioner for Information, Hon. Magnus Abe, had earlier said that holding the meeting at this period of national rebirth and reform was instructive. He described BON as an institution concerned with the wellbeing of Nigeria. He lauded the organisation for its far reaching contribution to the society and described the broadcast industry in Rivers state as 'progressive.'



Justice Niki Tobi, Confab Chairman

ABUJA TRUST

Workers to protest sale of houses

Workers in the Federal civil service said they would protest government's decision to sell houses allocated to them as official quarters without due consideration.

President of the Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU) Chief Fidelis Edeh, who made this known to the News Agency of Nigeria NAN today in Abuja, said that nine unions in the service would be involved in the protest.

"Workers will be mobilised to protest government's decision to sell houses that we have been contributing to for the past ten years. We will definitely resist this move".

"Government has in the last 10 years deducted money from workers salaries to the National Housing Fund, making it 25 per cent of the cost of the houses.

"This action is a smack of injustice and also against the spirit of the principle of employment contract," Edeh added.

He said that government could not in one breath be talking about provision of houses for workers through the NHF and not gives occupants of such buildings the right to acquire them.

Edeh noted that government was actually indebted to workers having been deducting from their salaries for the NHF.

"Government should calculate what they are owing us and use that as down payment for the houses or refund our money while we make alternative arrangement," he added.

Meanwhile, workers under the aegis of the Joint National Public Service Negotiating Council (JNPSNC) have cautioned government against its planned retrenchment of 74,000 workers from the civil service.

In a statement made available to NAN, the council said the present 160,000 workforce in the service of government could not be too much for government to sustain and warned that it would resist any such retrenchment.

"The civil service personnel cost is about 17 per cent of the public sector budget. In an underdeveloped country like ours both the public and private sectors must create and sustain jobs.

"Why embark on massive premature retirement when it has been difficult to pay pensioners regularly," it stated.

It added that the cost of the planned retrenchment was uneconomical and wasteful apart from its negative implications of increasing hardship.

Members of the Council include, Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN), Agriculture and Allied Workers Union of Nigeria (AAWUN), Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCSU), and the Amalgamated Unions of Public Corporation, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Service Employees (AUPCTRE).

Others include, Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUW), National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM), Nigerian Union of Civil Service Secretariat and Stenographic Workers (NUCSTSAS) and the National Union of Printing, Publishing and Paper Products Workers (NUPPROW).

Prices of essential commodities remain stable in Abuja

In spite of the recent ban by the federal government on the importation of rice into the country, price of the commodity remained stable in Abuja markets.

A trader at Garki Monday market Abuja, Mr Fidelis Okezie told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) today that the traders did not have enough stock at the market like their counterparts in other markets.

"We don't have enough rice in stock, but the price has remained stable since the celebration of Eid-el Kabir in January, because of the level of demand," he said.

"A 50kg bag of Caprice still goes for N5,600, we have that of N4,300 and 25kg for N3,000, as it was since the beginning of the year," he said.

However, some customers noticed that even with the stability of the price, the 50kg and 25kg bags of rice were not as full as they used to be.

NAN observed that the bags of rice on sale in most of the markets in Abuja were re-packaged and the quantity reduced.

One of the customers, Mrs Folukemi Akerele said that the available imported rice were being hoarded by the traders as they envisaged scarcity because of the recent seizures by the customs.

Some of the traders told NAN that the hoarding was due to the recent pronouncement by the customs to raid shops for banned products.

The traders at the Wuse old market, Utako District and Garki Monday markets blamed the development on the recent ban by the federal government, without making adequate provision for local supply.

Vegetable oil all suffered the same fate as the recent ban without proper monitoring created room for flooding the market with verities of brands.

NAN gathered that in spite all odds the price of essential commodities had remained stable even with few days to the Easter celebration.

A cross section of the traders at the Wuse market noted that in spite of the stability and availability of some goods sales were still low.

Mr Obinna Chukwubuikem, noted that they were still hopeful of the last minute rush by parents to shop for children's wears.

Ecumenical centre: Four ex-police guards get bail

An Abuja Chief Magistrate's Court today granted bail to four ex-mobile policemen standing trial of alleged stealing of iron rods.

The accused, Amos Katuka, Yahaya Aminu, Joseph Sani and Chinedu Eke, all residents of Gwagwa village, a suburb of Abuja, were arraigned on a two-count charge of criminal conspiracy and theft.

They were said to have conspired on Feb. 27, this year and stole 200 pieces of iron rods of various sizes at the Ecumenical Centre, Abuja.

Prosecuting police officer ASP John Udeh, had earlier told the court that the accused committed the offence while on guard duty at the construction site of the centre.

Udeh said that the offence was reported by one Eusebius Oparaji, a security officer with Gillo construction company Abuja, and the value of the items were yet to be known, adding that the offences contravened the penal code.

The case was initially mentioned on March 7, this year and the accused pleaded not guilty to the charges while the lead defence counsel, Mr Dauda Hassan, applied for their bail.

Ruling today, the trial Magistrate Othman Musa granted the accused persons bail in the sum of N100,000 each with a surety in like sum and adjourned the case to May 4, for hearing.

In another development, a middle-aged man, Andrew Igbo, of Maitama Abuja, standing trial for allegedly having sex with a housewife was granted bail by the same court

Igbo was arraigned on a three-count charge of criminal intimidation, adultery and resisting arrest, offences which the prosecution said contravened the penal code.

He was accused of having illegal sexual intercourse with one Mrs Stanislava Falci, a Bulgarian of Dantata and Sawoe Life Camp Abuja and the incident was reported by Mr Fabio Falci, an Italian and husband of the woman.

According to the prosecutor, ASP Joseph Umoru, the complainant once caught the accused with his wife while committing the act and when he confronted the accused, he threatened to deal with him by ensuring he was deported to his country.

He was also alleged to have threatened to kill the investigation police officer (IPO) if she did not allow him to go free during police investigation.

The accused pleaded not guilty while the Defence Counsel, Mr Ugechi Ogbonna, had earlier applied for his bail.

FCT NDLEA impounds over N0.5m drug

By Benjamin Auta, *Crime Reporter*

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has intercepted over 365.5kg of Indian Hemp (Canabis sativa) worth over half a million naira last week.

Parading the suspects before newsmen, the FCT commander of the NDLEA, Ishaku NP Iliya said the command intercepted the drugs on a tip off from well meaning Nigerians who have help the officers of the agency in fighting the menace of crime.

The NDLEA, boss said that the first suspect, Emmanuel Ogbu, Aka Osama bin Laden, was arrested along Abaji-Lokoja road on March 20, 2005 in possession of over 47 bags of Indian hemp weighing over 344.5kg and valued at five hundred and sixty thousand naira.

Mal. Iliya, further said that Emmanuel Ogbu, reliably told the Agency he is transporting the drugs to Sabon Gari in Kano State where he said he was paid the sum of N40,000 to convey the drugs from Edo State.

The NDLEA, boss also paraded another man Garba Usman aka Longman also arrested along the same Abaji-Lokoja road in possession of two bags of Indian hemp weighing 21kg after a tip off.

The NDLEA boss, further said that the suspect operate from gidan Gwari Gegu Beki in Kogi State.

He said the suspect who has made reasonable statement to the Agency in respect to the arrest and also said that the value of the drug was over N30,000.

Mal. Iliya, said the Agency has received the United State's certificate as a drug fighting nation for four years running which has help in improving the "image of the nation in no small way."

He also said that drug related (Indian Hemp) situation has greatly improved as the command has been battling to make the capital city free of drugs.



ABUJA TRUST

FCDA yet to produce forms for sale of houses

Arrangements have been concluded by the FCDA to make application forms available for the purchase of the 30,000 federal government-owned housing units in the FCT.

The Chief Press Secretary to the FCDA Chairman, Mr Kingsley Agha, made this known recently in Abuja.

'Agha said the forms would be available with effect from April 1, in all ministries, departments and agencies.

"They would also be available at bank branches, post offices and agencies of the FCT administration .They are free and downloadable on the Internet on www.abujaagis.com or www.fmf.gov.ng

"Applicants must provide all information requested for the forms to avoid delays in processing or rejection of offer to purchase the residential facilities they occupy," he said.

He said that the sales which was approved by the federal executive council, included all residential facilities like houses and flats built, acquired or otherwise owned by federal government and all ministries, departments and agencies.

According to him, houses exempted from the exercise include those of the President, Vice President, Senate President and his deputy; Speaker of the House of Representatives and his deputy.

"Houses of the Chief Justice and justices of Supreme and Appellate Courts; FCT minister, presidential guest houses and safe houses of the intelligence community are also exempted from the exercise.

"Other houses on the exemption list included those within the security zone of the state house, barracks for the military and paramilitary as well as other approved uniform services.

"The remaining ones are institutional residences within schools, hospitals, power plants, dams and universities," he said.

Agha said that the valuation of the houses would be based on "open market" value of the buildings as determined by FCDA or its appointed professional valuers.

He said that the houses which would be sold to the highest bidder would have the current occupant having the first right of refusal within 30 days of offer.

"The said right to purchase at the highest bid price is neither transferable, assignable nor alienable in any way or form.

"Strict compliance with the development control standards must be adhered to by all purchasers.

"No additional structures can be built without permission of the Development Control office of the FCDA," he said.



President of the conference of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, His Grace, Dr. John Onaiyekan (r), CAN President, the Most Rev. Peter Akinola (m) and the Archbishop of Umuahia Diocese, Lucius Ugoji during the Bishops conference held in Abuja...recently.

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FG to relocate 49 FCT villages, says minister

At least 49 villages consisting of 41,270 households are to give way to the federal government's plan to revert to the original resettlement scheme for indigenes of the FCT.

Briefing newsmen at the end of today's meeting of the Federal Executive Council (FEC), the FCT Minister, Malam Nasir El-Rufai, said that government had "accepted in principle to revert to the 1978 plan for resettlement of original Abuja indigenes' El-Rufai said that under the new plan, the villages still within the FCT would be resettled in three neighbouring local councils and that only original Abuja indigenes would be catered for.

"There are additional 253,000 household squatters that would also be affected by the new plan," but stressed that only the indigenes would enjoy the resettlement package.

The minister named some of the villages to be affected to include most of those along the airport road such as Aleta, Chika, Durumi, Gaduwa, Gishiri, Gwagwa, Idu, Jiwa and Kado life camp.

Others are Kuchingoro, Lugbe, Mabushi, Pyakassa and Garki village over, which, he said, a consultancy firm on urban renewal would soon be appointed to advice on how to handle the villages.

He said that the compensation package include a farmland and house and another plot within the FCT, adding that government was only interested in sustaining the original plan for developing the new capital.

The minister said that he would return to council with a detailed plan of action on the implementation of the resettlement plan, which, he said, would be completed within the next three years.

He stressed that "extensive discussions" were held with the community leaders of all the 49 affected villages and that they had accepted the government plan.

El-Rufai said that he also got government approval to upgrade some major roads within the city and some feeders to reduce the high traffic on those roads, he said.

FEC approved the purchase of two roll-in, roll-on gabbage trucks from Anamco for the FCT and gave the go ahead for the roofing of the national theatre at the cost of more than N323.4 million.

Abaji LG boss awards N24m borehole drilling contract

The chairman of Abaji Area Council in the federal capital territory (FCT), Alhaji Muhammad Angulu Loko, has awarded a contract to the tune of N24 million naira for drilling of boreholes in twenty communities in the area council.

The council chairman who stated this when inspecting one of the hand pump borehole at the federal low cost housing estate in the area recently. The chairman while inspecting the ongoing project expressed satisfaction on how the project was carried out as a job well executed.

Alhaji Loko, however observed that the perennial water scarcity in Abaji metropolis and the communities would soon come to past as his administrate would make all effort to provide social amenities to the residence in the area so that they would feel the impact of demoeratic dividend in the area council.

He further said that the residents in the area had suffered a lot in the area of lack of potable drinking water, adding that some of the residents had to pad far distance searching for water while those without alternative had to buy from water vendors.

The chairman said the effort his administration was making, would enhance many communities in the area to have portable drinking water.

Alhaji Loko, therefore implored the residents of federal low cost housing to handle and make good use of newly constructed hand pump borehole, so that it would eased their suffering.

The council head of works department Alhaji Jibrin Gani, who accompanied the council chairman during the inspection of the project site, also commended the chairman for giving priority to development and providing of social amenities to the people of area council.

Alhaji Gani, further urged the resident of federal low cost housing to make good use the newly constructed borehole, and appealed to them to give the present administration a full cooperation so that it will achieved its desire objectives.

National Confab: Youth corp members escape internet scam

By Abbas Abdullah, *(NYSC)*

Batch 'B' 2004 serving corps members in Bwari, Kude and Abuja Municipal (AMAC) Area Councils may have survive an attempt by a (or some) con-man attempting to defraud them of their hard-earned stipend monthly allowance.

A notice of application urging corps members in the three area councils to apply for enlistment as adhoc administrative staff (volunteer) at the ongoing national political reform conference (NPRC) was shown to the 'Corpers' at the respective community development service (CDS) venues last week Tuesday and Wednesday.

The notice among other information asked corps members to forward their names, local government, state of origin, course of study, Institution attended, religion, contact address (in Abuja), telephone numbers and national youth service corps (NYSC) registration number to an e-mail address. napolconfab@yahoo.com.

The unsuspecting youth corpers were surprised after checking their e-mail boxes on Tuesday as directed by the earlier notice, discovered that they are to pay for a training programme through a Bank Draft or postal order in the sum of N2000.00k "only drawn in favour of Mr. Idanosi Isaac B. and sent to P.O.Box 10947 Garki Area 10 Abuja."

The shortlistment for interview which was sent as a reply through another e-mail address: conference personnel unit@yahoo.com also stated that successful applicants will enjoy the following benefits: free lunch and transportation on daily basis (Monday-Saturday), N3,040.00k weekly allowance plus overtime incurred as well as training plus participation certificates among others for the programme slated for April-June.

Some of the corps members (names withheld) who visited the public affairs unit of the International Conference Centre (ICC), venue of the national confab for clarifications were told by officials of the unit to ignore the whole scenario and watch-out for unpatriotic elements who they said have found their way-in to dupe unsuspecting Nigerians.

Some of the corpers also said that they receive telephone calls from a man acknowledging the receipt of the applications by the corps members on GSM number 08057327406. The number has been diverted to voice mail after several attempt by our correspondent to make contact.

Our correspondent also gathered that the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) headed by Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Nuhu Ribadu have been contacted over the issue.

KANO TRUST

HIV/AIDS victims urged to be productive

By Ahmad Abubakar,
Reporter (Kano)

People living with HIV/AIDS were called upon to be actively productive to the society in order not to be stigmatised by members of the community they live in.

The deputy governor, Engineer Magaji Abdullahi made the appeal while receiving an international delegate from centre for strategic and international studies at the government House in Kano.

Engineer Magaji Abdullahi also tasks the United State of America and other countries to speed up effort in searching for the cure to this monster disease describing HIV/AIDS as the most challenging task to mankind in the last century.

Magaji Abdullahi also appealed to the United States to assist Kano state in its effort to import antiretroviral drugs for people suffering from the disease in the state.

He said the massive import is necessary for victims to be able to contain the impact of the disease and also to reduce the weight of burden of the exorbitant price of antiretroviral drugs presently in the markets.

The leader of the delegation, Dr. Peter Lamptey said they are in the country to access the impact of HIV/AIDS on some third world countries which Nigeria is included.

Dr. Lamptey however said, their findings and reports will determine the kind of support to be rendered through the American president emergency response to HIV initiative.

18 artistes to perform in France

By Jamilah Nuhu,
Correspondent (Kano)

Eighteen artistes from Kano state are to participate in a festival of culture in France mid April. The permanent secretary of history and culture bureau Kano, Alhaji Ahmad Aminu has disclosed.

The permanent secretary disclosed this to Kano Trust during a Chinese photo exhibition held at Gidan Dan Hausa in Kano.

Alhaji Ahmad Aminu further revealed that the Shantu group, Nasiru Garba super and Dankaka Rigo were amongst the artistes who will performed in Paris.

The perm sec of Gidan Dan Hausa (History and Culture Bureau) said that the festival tag 'the world festival of imagination' would be organised by History and Culture Bureau in conjunction with Alliance Francaise.

He observed that the Chinese exhibition brought together the Chinese community and Kano, people who had enjoyed cordial relationship for a long time.

And expressed optimism that the people of Kano would borrow a leaf from the Chinese who have made tremendous strides in the development of the China nation.

He called on leaders in the country to shun greed, selfishness and corrupt practices for the Nigeria nation to, achieve greater heights.

Alhaji Ahmad Aminu then commended the Shekarau administration for the implementation of the shariah legal system of social



The State Minister of Water Resources, Engr. Bashir Ishola Awotorebo congratulating Kano State Governor, Malam Ibrahim Shekarau after presenting him 880 Hand/Pumps boreholes equipment donated by the federal government to the Kano state.

Ministry spends N7m for women empowerment

By Mustapha Isah Kwaru,
Correspondent (Kano)

As part of its strategy to control the growing spate of unemployment among women and street hawking by young girls, the Kano state ministry of women affairs and social development has expended the sum of N7million for the purchase of various skills acquisition materials which were distributed to women.

The state commissioner of the ministry, Dr. Gaji Fatima Dantata dropped the hint in a speech delivered as part of activities marking the 2005 international women's day celebration.

Represented by the permanent secretary of the ministry, Alhaji Baffa Bello, the commissioner lamented that insufficient and untimely intervention of past governments in the area of women empowerment had contributed a lot to the deteriorating condition.

Dr. Fatima argued that the advent of the present administration had paved the way for a series of policies and programmes for women empowerment so as to be self-reliant.

She maintained that government has revived women skills acquisition centres at Kura, Gwarzo, Kabo and Dambatta local government areas, among others.

According to her new skill acquisition centres were also established at Takai, Warawa and Ungogo local governments, adding that seminars and workshop are being organised for women on how to embrace empowerment policies.

Dr. Fatima pointed out that the ministry is presently implementing the United Nations declaration on the rights of women. The teachings and principles of Islam

Islamic. Jurisdiction will be sent to the state assembly for onward enactment of law that will fully implemented.

Also speaking at the occasion wife of the state governor, Hajia Amina Ibrahim Shekarau explained that March 8th of every year had been put aside by the UN as international women's day in order to protect their rights as well as map out modalities to cushion their ill-treatment and plight.

She observed that governments readiness for the implementation of UN declaration on women rights facilitated its decision to exempt girls from payment of school fees from primary to secondary levels.

The governor's wife also added that government directive that all pregnant women be give free medical care treatment was a clear signal of its zeal to eradicate their predicaments.

Electric faults caused 95% fire outbreak in Kano –*Director*

The Kano state fire service has expressed great concerned over the growing spate of rampant cases of fire outbreak especially during night hours at residential houses, just as it raised alarm that 95 percent of the inferno is caused by electric fault.

The director of the state fire service, Umaru Mohammed Soron Dinki, who dropped the hint, while briefing newsmen in his office lamented that the lingering fire outbreak that pervaded the residential houses, claimed the lives of innocent people, while properties to the tune of several thousands of naira destroyed.

According to the director, research carried out by the department indicates that most of the inferno is caused by electric fluctuation due to high or low voltage.

Mohammed Soron Dinki, who frowned at the ill-attitude of some residents icane lamp or candle on, saying such unwholesome act fa-cilitates fire incidents.

He argued that the only way to curtail the problem is that the general public should always switch-off all electrical appliances before going to bed.

Responding to question on the modalities put in place to enhance the services of the fire service to rural areas, the director explained that additional out stations will soon be commissioned in atleast five local government areas.

According to him, the state government has provided sufficient funds for the purchase of fire fighting equipments and other chemicals, stressing however that the measure has contributed a lot towards effective and rapid fire control as well as management.

Mohammed Soron Dinki implored the general public and stake holders to join forces with the board in its crusade to ensure a fire free

Pensioners ask EFCC to probe directorate over allowance

By Yusha'u Adamu Ibrahim,
Correspondent (Kano)

Military pensioners in Kano state have appealed to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to as a matter of urgency probe the directorate of military pension (DMP) over the issue of their 7 month outstanding pension allowances.

Speaking to *Kano Trust*, one of the military pensioners, Captain Yusuf Abdul-Malik (rtd) said pensioners are tired with unfulfilled promises and resolved to call the attention of the EFCC chairman, Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu to investigate the matters.

The retired captain disclosed that the House of Representatives committee on defence despite the facts that the committee some times in 2003 investigated the matter but now remained silence over the issue.

He stated that the committee's investigation led to the admission of withholding of military pensioner fund by

revealed that the National House of Representatives committee had discovered that some banks mandated for handling pensioner fund withholding huge portion of the fund.

Captain Yusuf, therefore said since the committee has failed to settle the military pensioner, the EFCC should intervene and bring the matter to an end. He expressed optimism that the EFCC chairman will sympathise with the military pensioners to look into the issue.

He revealed that I wonder why military pensioners were totally neglected despite the fact that they spent most of their lives in service the nation but now they have been denied access to their legitimate right."

Capt Yusuf Abdulmalik therefore called on other military pensioners across the country to intensify prayers

EKO TRUST

LASG secures N690m loan for health sector

The Lagos State Government has secured a credit/loan facility of $5 million (N690 Million) for the rehabilitation and reinvigoration of its healthcare facilities.

The Commissioner for Health Dr. Leke Pitan who disclosed this recently while briefing pressmen on the activities of his ministry in the last one year, said the facility secured from the World Bank will ensure the revamping of the sector.

He also stated that about N290 million has been expended by the Lagos State Government in pursuit of its free Healthcare programmes covering the under 12, the aged (over 60) and free antenatal care for pregnant women.

He said N139.9 million was expended on the programme by all the seconday and tertiary health facilities, N137.5 million was expended on overseas treatment for patients and citizens whose cases demands such while N11.5 million was expended on local medical refunds.

Pitan, who said this does not include such other programmes as the Eko Free Malaria Treatment, Limb Deforming Reconstructive and Rehabilitation Programme (LDRRP) and Free treatment for civil servants, also said 800 patients were screened under the (LDRRP), 82 operated and 200 referred for physiotherapy.

Stating also that the state had attracted various surgical/medical expendition by such groups as Association of Nigeria Physician in the America (ANA) and Global Eagle Foundation, Pitan disclosed that equipment/instruments worth over N100million have been donated to the state's health facility.

He said the critical care unit established by the administration to provide medicare for the critically ill had also been enhanced with the procurement of 20 mobile intensive care units (MICU) adding too that over 20,000 persons were treated.

Assuring that such programmes as the Hypertension and Diabetes Screening, Breast Cancer Campaign, Blindness Prevention Programme, and the HIV/AIDS campaign Hello-Lagos, will continue, the Commissioner said emphasis will be on the combating the increased case of tuberculosis.

He said there has been an increase in number of reported cases of TB from 3,022 to 3,304 leading to the strengthening of its 31 DOT (Directly Observed short course Therapy) centers.

Dr. Pitan further disclosed that the about 50,000 pupils from the 931 Primary Schools in the state were given free milk twice weekly under the School Health Programme.

Putting the out patient attendant at LASUTH at over 600,000 based on an average attendance of about 1,602 patients, the Commissioner said government will continue to upgrade its facilities to a world class level.

The Commissioner also stated various facilities have been identified as for conversion and upgrading in fulfillment of the plans to establish befitting General Hospitals at Amuwo Odofin, Ojo, Ifako-Ijaiye, Somolu and Mushin addting that the hospitals will be equipped from the donations by cook county Hospital, Chicago.



Picknikers dancing to musk at Amuno Odofin, Lagos on easter.. Pix: Oladipupo Odunewu.

Mystery snake appears with photographs, candles, names

By Olumide Bajulaiye, *Correspondent, Lagos*

The village of Mosafejo in Badagry area of Lagos state last Thursday, attract a mystery snake bearing passport-size photograph, of seven persons and three black candles appeared in public.

The snake, which was said to have bee overrun by a vehicle, also had in its stomach eight other names of persons.

Residents of Mosafejo community including the traditional ruler, Chief Joseph Yewhenu were full of surprise at the discovery made by two brothers while attempting to cook the snake.

According to one of the two brothers, simply identified as Wole, a vehicle overran the snake in the early hours of last Thursday and that his brother brought it home for cook.

Seyi the other brother disclosed that while attempting to roast the snake, "something that looked like a passport picture became visible from its stomach, it was then I asked my brother to bring a knife so that we can see it properly."

He said after slicing the belly they found seven-passport photograph, eight other names of some people and three black candles.

"We were not sure of what the black thing was until we notice that one of them was already melting because of the heat from the fire", he said.

It is on that note that the whole village was alerted of what they have seen, and they could not eat the snake again.

The traditional of the community, Chief Yewhenu while speaking with our correspondent said he his 100 year on earth, he had never witnessed such a thing.

A representative of the Christian community in the village, Apostle Debi Akinolu has however linked the discovery to the spiritual liberation of the people involved in the snake.

According to Akinolu, the spiritual implication of the death of the snake was that the 16 people whose pictures or names were kept in the belly had been set free.

The chief Imam of the village, Abdul Lateef Shabi said it beats normal human understanding how the deed was accomplished but explained that the world was full of various evil-minded people.

NGO awards scholarships 26 students

As part of efforts to spread the dividends of democracy within the less privilege Nigerians, and to further give an uplift to education in Lagos, the Wunmi Bewaji Foundation has awarded scholarship to 26 students drawn from Lagos Mainland, his constituency and other parts of the state.

The Wunmi Bewaji Foundation 2005 award ceremony, according to the founder was a celebration of 50 years of free education in Western Region of the country, now South West, between 1955-2005.

According t Bewaji who represents Lagos Mainland at the Lower House, Abuja, the gesture, which started since 1999, is his own way of empowering younger ones in Lagos state.

He explained that the annual Scholarship Award took another dimension as an account to the tune of N20, 000 has already been opened with Guaranty Trust Bank, Herbert Macaulay branch, Yaba, for this year recipients made up of Junior and Secondary School students.

The lucky students were selected based on a screening that held by the coordinator of the foundation, Mr. Rauf Ayodeji the secretary Yaba Local Government Area.

The first four students that excelled were given additional gifts, they include; Miss Temitope Ojelade of Queens College, Yaba, who came first with 83.7percent; Oluchi Emelobo of Onike Junior Girls School who pulled 82percent and Master Francis Akinbola of St. Francis Junior High School who scored 76percent.

Bewaji, the Alliance for Democracy AD leader at the House of Representative, expressed desire to meet regularly with a view to monitoring them for further assistance.

Some of the parents whose ward was among the recipients, Mrs. Margaret Bello and Mrs. Ojelade whose daughter came first lauded the programme and called on other people representatives to emulate Bewaji Foundation.

Assembly member donates N.5m to fight poverty

The Lagos State Governor, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu has declared that the war against poverty in the state is winnable, as the chief whip in the Lagos State House of Assembly, Mrs. Funmi Tejuosho launched a poverty alleviation scheme in her constituency by donating equipment worth over N.5m to people of its area.

The lawmaker, representing the Mushin Constituency of the state supplied 32 motorbikes, 63 telephones and lines, 21 grinding machines and five 20-U machines.

generators, 12 bags of rice and 12 bags of beans to start off the residents on small-scale businesses.

The donation, part of the lawmakers Sustainable War Against Poverty in the area, saw the donation of N5,000 each to 30 recipients in the state.

Tejuosho said during the programme that poverty has been responsible for the insecurity and corruption in the land, saying that by setting up SWAP she was fighting the scourge in her own way.

"We must always remind ourselves that poverty breeds insecurity of life and property and that to that ensuring our own security", she said.

The Lagos State Governor who spoke at the occasion gave N.5 million to the SWAP foundation, while calling on political office holders and politicians to emulate the good gesture.

He said what the lawmaker did by the donation was to give vent to the idea of self-employment, adding that with the support of all stakeholders the war against poverty in the state would be easily won.

"Being poor is neither shameful nor sinful, but poverty is unacceptable in a society where the few privileged can collaborate to the life of the generality of

Motor accident claims five

By Bola Oguola, *Correspondent, Lagos*

Five persons were killed at the weekend in a fatal motor accient which occurred in Ojo area of Lagos.

Eko Trust learnt that a Bedford tipper lorry with registration number AA 726 registration number XJ 909 GGE at Oseni bus-stop along LASU Isheri road at about on the spot.

Four other passengers of the commercial bus including two female are now receiving treatment from a nearby private hospital where their

News

Rivers reduces tractor hiring, fertilizer costs by 50%

From Muhammed Ajah,
Correspondent (PH)

The Rivers State government has moved in to reduce the cost of tractor hiring and price of a bag of fertilizer to farmers in the state by 50% for this plating season.

Governor Peter Oidili, who gave the hint at the formal launching of the 2005 state farming season it Obio/ Akpor local government area charged Rivers farmers to shun their old farming methods and embrace the new techniques as a way of boosting the agricultural produce this year.

He said the state ministry of agriculture has been directed to effect the reduction in the costs of hiring farm tractors fertilizers sales by half the former cost

The governor said that launching of state farming season would henceforth be celebrated in rural areas as it is the key to prosperity.

According to him, the richest people in the world were farmers and not oil workers. He also advised fishermen who use explosives to stop so since it was an unhealthy way of catching fish and has charged the agriculture ministry to mount campaigns against it.

In his remarks, the commissioner for Agriculture, Mr. Ndubuisi Adikana, expressed gratitude with the release of twenty-three million naira as cost collateral by the state government for a loan from the Nigeria Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development (NACRDB) Bank and for the release of funds to execute the Massive Food Production and Employment Generation Programme.

Adikema commended the government's gesture which he said has aided food production and hinted that the policy on the progrmme would be modified and presented to the state executive council for proper action.

The Chairman, All Farmers Association of Nigeria, Rivers Chapter, Mr. Chinnah Lambrocke, had earlier noted that the event brought stakeholders in the farming industry together to enhance productivity in the sector.



Corporate Affairs Commission Registrar-General, Ahmed Al-Mustapha (c) and National Pension Commission DG, Ahmad Muhammed during the Public hearing on a Bill to amend the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC) Act of 1988, at the National Assembly Complex, Abuja ... recently *Pix: Felix Onigbinde*

UNN plans to introduce internet admission - *V-C*

Nsukka (UNN) has completed plans to introduce Internet admission from the next academic session.

The Vice-chancellor of the university, Prof. Chinedu Nebo, disclosed the plan at the weekend in Enugu in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria.

(NAN)

Nebo said the new arrangement became imperative in order to check admission racketeering.

He said that since he assumed office, so many students had been rusticated and some staff punished for indulging in admission racketeering.

The vice-chancellor also said the university had gone into partnership with some communication outfits in the country to computerise the various departments in the university.

He said his administration would need not less than N4 billion to improve its infrastructure, adding that the infrastructure in the university were collapsing and needed immediate rehabilitation.

"For so many years, not much was done to improve infrastructure in the university campuses. All the facilities are outdated and the situation is affecting the standard of education," he said.

He called on the federal and state governments, corporate bodies and philanthropists and other stake holders to assist the university by rehabilitating the collapsing infrastructure.



Liyel Imoke, Education minister

Ado-Ekiti Varsity college of medicine not scrapped, *says V-C*

From Femi Oladipo
Ado-Ekiti

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ado-Ekiti, Professor Israel Orubuloye has declared that the state government has suspended the take-off of the institutions, proposed College of Medicine.

Addressing a press conference at the University campus to mark his first year anniversary in office, Prof. Orubuloye said it is not true that the college of medicine has been cancelled by the state government.

According to the Vice-Chancellor, the state government is delaying the take-off to enable it embark on proper planning to ensure that the college meets the expected standard.

On the fate of the 28 students initially admitted by college, the Vice-Chancellor disclosed that the authorities of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) and University of Ilorin, have already indicated their preparedness to absorb the students.

Speaking on his achievements in the past one year, Professor Orubuloye said, the state government has bought a brand new300 KVA generating set to improve power supply to the University while a N25 million poultry project has been located in the University by government to boost research in the faculty of agricultural sciences.

He said his administration has established a printing press at a cost of N10 million and provided internet facilities to enable staff and students have access to information world wide.

Meanwhile, the 3,500 newly matriculated students of the institution have been advised to abstain from undesirable behaviour that can bring their names and that of the university into disrepute

Gov endorses FG anti-corruption crusade

From Isa Umar Gusau,
(Damaturu

Following the N55 million bribery scandal that has hit the Nigeria politics recently during which the Professor Fubian Osuji, was dismissed as education minister, Governor Bukar Abba Ibrahim of Yobe State, has described President Obasanjo's action as a "crusade that should continue."

Governor Ibrahim made his observation at the weekend in Damaturu, Yobe State capital while responding to questions from journalists shortly before addressing his council members.

According to him, "President Obasanjo has shown practically, that he means business. This action is a crusade that should continue. The fight against corruption is a crusade that should be actualized. I am totally in support of Mr. President," Governor Ibrahim said.

He noted that the action of President Obasanjo, which did not make him dismiss the Senate President among others involved was because, "the President has no powers to do so" saying that Obasanjo has demonstrated his combat readiness to fight corruption in Nigeria.

Governor Ibrahim observed that the President was right over his statement that Nigeria's debts would not be cancelled when the country's image is portrayed as corrupt, saying that Obasanjo must continue to prove to the entire world that things are changing for the better.

It should be recalled that or ly recently, Governor Bu kar Abba Ibrahim had thrown his weight behind President Obasanjo, over the announcement of immunity with a v w to fighting corruption.

The Yobe Governor, *Daily Trust* gathered had earlier declared public his desire to set up a commission to counter corruption in Yobe State even though it is yet to be actualized.

Daily Trust however, gathered that the opposition of People Democratic Party (PDP) in the state had reportedly accused Governor Ibrahim's administration of lack of proper administration, thus aiding series of corrupt practices involving various commissioners in the state, leading to the expulsion of one commissioner sometime last year.

Obasanjo reiterates commitment to fight corruption

President Olusegun Obasanjo yesterday in Ota, Ogun State, reiterated his commitment in the fight against corruption.

Speaking at his farmhouse chapel in a service to mark the Easter celebration, Obasanjo said he would fight on undaunted.

"It is only in Nigeria that you can catch a thief and he takes you to court," he said.

He said if the church could not damn the consequences and join in the anti-corruption crusade, it would stand condemned.

"If elders openly support corruption, such elders should not be respected," Obasanjo said, adding that there was nothing wrong if his campaign was aimed at debt relief.

He said that western nations believed that if all was well with Nigeria, all would be well for the rest of Africa, and pledged to work hard to make Nigeria right.

Obasanjo was joined in the church service by the Japanese ambassador to Nigeria, Mr Akio Tanaka, Gov. Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State, and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos, Prof. Ibidapo Obe.

Special prayers were offered for the president, his family and for peace, stability and development in the country.

The bishop of the chapel, Mr Peter Okudua, read a special message entitled: "Death cannot stop their love" in which he extolled the virtues of love among humanity.

Okudua criticised those who condemned Obasanjo for his renewed fight against corruption, noting that Malam El-Rufai had been vindicated.

He urged Obasanjo to extend his anti-corruption crusade to the church.

Other dignitaries who were at Ota on consultation with the president included ECOWAS Secretary-General Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Head of Service, Alhaji Yayale Ahmed, and aviation minister Malam Isa Yuguda

Fire guts EFCC Lagos office

From Olumide Bajulaiye,
(Lagos)

The Lagos office of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) located along Awolowo Road, Ikoyi was on Saturday gutted by a mysterious fire.

But for the quick intervention of men of the Federal Fiore Service, Onikan and some staff of the Commission, it would have been completely razed down.

The inferno was reported to have started in one of the down floors housing EFCC's strong room.

A source close to the commission informed that while the cause of the fire is yet unknown, it was obvious that it would happen (our source however, allayed the fears of the public, saying that all documents are duplicated and kept in other locations of the offices across the nation.

While efforts are being made to know the cause of the inferno, the police and staff of the commission refused to give any useful information on the incident.

The incident has already been reported at the Onikan Police Station, by two EFCC officials.

News

Stakeholders strategise against malaria

From Samson Ojo,
Correspondent (Lagos)

Netmark, a leading partner in Nigeria's Roll Back Malaria (RBM) programme, in collaboration with other stakeholders, have scheduled a dissemination meeting from March 28 to March 31 in Abuja to enable them review the successes so far recorded and consider new moves against the disease.

According to USAID's Netmark Nigeria office, the purpose of the meeting is to share the successes and lessons learned by the Netmark project in Nigeria, as well as provide a forum for the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) community in Nigeria to share experiences, evaluate the progress made so far in the fight against malaria, and consider new directions for public-private partnership for preventing malaria.

The dissemination meeting scheduled to hold at the NICON Hilton Hotel Abuja will feature speeches, presentations, panel discussion, and a new exhibition focused on mosquito nets and ITMs in Nigeria. The event, *Daily Trust* learnt, will attract many important dignitaries and professionals in public health. The Honourable Minister of Health, Professor Eyitayo Lambo, will be the guest of honour. Other dignitaries expected at the event include the US ambassador to Nigeria and the Director of USAID in Nigeria, heads of multilateral and bilateral organisations in Nigeria, as well as important players in the private sector including multinationals such as Exxon Mobil, Shell, MTN etc.



Minister of communication, Senator Cornelius Adebayo launching the new logo of NIPOST during the unveiling ceremony held at the Musa Yar'adua centre, Abuja ...recently. With him is the Postmaster-General Alhaji Abubakar Musa Argungu.
Pix: Joe Oroye.

Easter: Opara urges Nigerians to pray for leaders

The Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Chief Austin Opara, has called on Christians to pray for the country's leadership and the sustenance of the nation's young democracy. Opara's message was contained in a statement signed by his Special Assistant, Media Relations, Austin Uganwa, in which he congratulated Christians on the occasion of Good Friday and Easter celebrations. He said that there was need for Nigerians to offer prayers for the advancement of the socioeconomic pace of the nation as well as moral rectitude, peace, unity, love, and oneness. 'The nation's democracy has come to stay, but we have to sustain it through prayers, collective support for the political leaders, respect for the constitution, and the rule of law,' he said. He stressed that the season should be celebrated in an orderly, peaceful, and friendly climate devoid of rancour and violence.

Opara explained that the National Assembly fine-tuned the 2005 budget to allow the benefits to trickle down to the masses and enhance socioeconomic development in the country. While preaching religious harmony, the Deputy Speaker called on all religious groups to extend hands of fellowship to one another at all times.

Muslim Ummah denounce Nigeria's secularism

By Uthman Abubakar,
Senior Reporter (Features)

Delegates to this year's Ummah Annual Convention organised by the National Islamic Centre, Zaria have denounced secularism as the philosophy underpinning the affairs of the government of the country. They stated in a communiqué issued at the end of the 3-day convention that 'while we totally reject secularism as a philosophy of government, we insist on true federalism in all its ramifications, legal, fiscal, and the police as the only guarantee for the survival of Nigeria as a single entity where citizens live in peace and dignity.'

The denunciation followed their observation that the country was not presently run according to the true federal system of government, which has, according to them, given rise to fear, insecurity, and the outright frustration of various groups in the nation. They also decried 'too much dependence on oil to the almost total neglect of agriculture and other potential revenue generating sectors of the economy' as they lamented that the main problem pulling the Nigerian nation down to its knees was corruption and bad governance.

All efforts, the delegates advised, should be made to revive and develop the non-oil sector of the national economy, especially agriculture, which, they maintained, accounts for over 41 percent of the country's GDP. 'While we appreciate the recent exposure of corruption, we call on the government to be more serious and more committed to fighting corruption by applying the same rule to all and sundry. Selective fighting of corruption is another form of corruption,' they posited.

In the communique signed by Muhammad Awwal Ahmad, the secretary of the National Islamic Centre, the delegates also urged all tiers of government in the northern states to embark on a special intervention scheme to salvage the *Almajiri* system from disrepute. They also called for adequate funding of education by government, especially in less developed states.

The over 1000 delegates drawn from all states of the federation who sat between Friday and Sunday March 25-27 at the National Mosque, Abuja called on states implementing the *Shari'a* to look collectively at children's rights act with a view to making sure that their provisions are in line with the *Shari'a*.



Director general of Voice of Nigeria, Alhaji Abubakar Jijiwa, answering questions from journalist shortly after his confirmation as the substantive DG of VON ...recently.
Pix: Waziri Gwantu.

FG to incorporate DOTS guidelines in medical institutions

The federal government today in Abuja announced plans to incorporate 'Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS)' guidelines into the curriculum of medical and paramedical institutions. DOTS, a WHO recommended strategy for treating tuberculosis (TB), involves direct observation of treatment, government commitment, microscopy services, uninterrupted drug supply, and the monitoring system. Health Minister Adeoye Lambo, who announced the plan in a message to mark the 2005 'World Stop TB Day,' described DOTS as 'a highly effective low technology treatment that cures tuberculosis.' He said that the success rate of the strategy had been put at 80 per cent.

Lambo observed that the key to controlling TB was to make sure that the patient swallowed each dose of medicine in the presence of health or community workers or trained volunteers for the initial phase of three months treatment. 'For the remaining six months, patients can swallow medicine at home, making a total treatment period of eight or nine months,' he said.

Inside Politics

Wayas kicks against new state for Cross River

Former Senate President Joseph Wayas has said it was not feasible to create a state for Cross River through National Political Reforms Conference.

Wayas, the leader of Cross River delegation at the conference, stated his position at the weekend at a public forum in Calabar.

The forum was organised by Cross River government to enable the State take a consensus position on national issues at the conference.

But in a swift reaction, participants at the forum shouted down Wayas who was also the Chairman of the public forum.

Wayas argued that Cross River was only one out of the 36 States and state creation for now could not be possible.

The old Ogoja province now split into Central and Northern Senatorial districts unanimously requested for the creation of Ogoja state.

Former Secretary to Cross River government Anthony Abuo called for creation of Ogoja State to bring government closer to the people.

In his presentation, the speaker for Abi Council Area, Mr Samuel Ekpata, called for more States and Local Council Areas.

He alleged that states creation in the past was done haphazardly.

Wayas also disagreed with his people's demand for 50 per cent revenue derivation as against the present 13 per cent.

He advised the people to allow the delegates to debate and agree on the sharing pattern.

...as Kwara Ekitis oppose Osin state

The Ekiti speaking people in Kwara state have dissociated themselves from a 24-page memorandum sent to the national political conference.

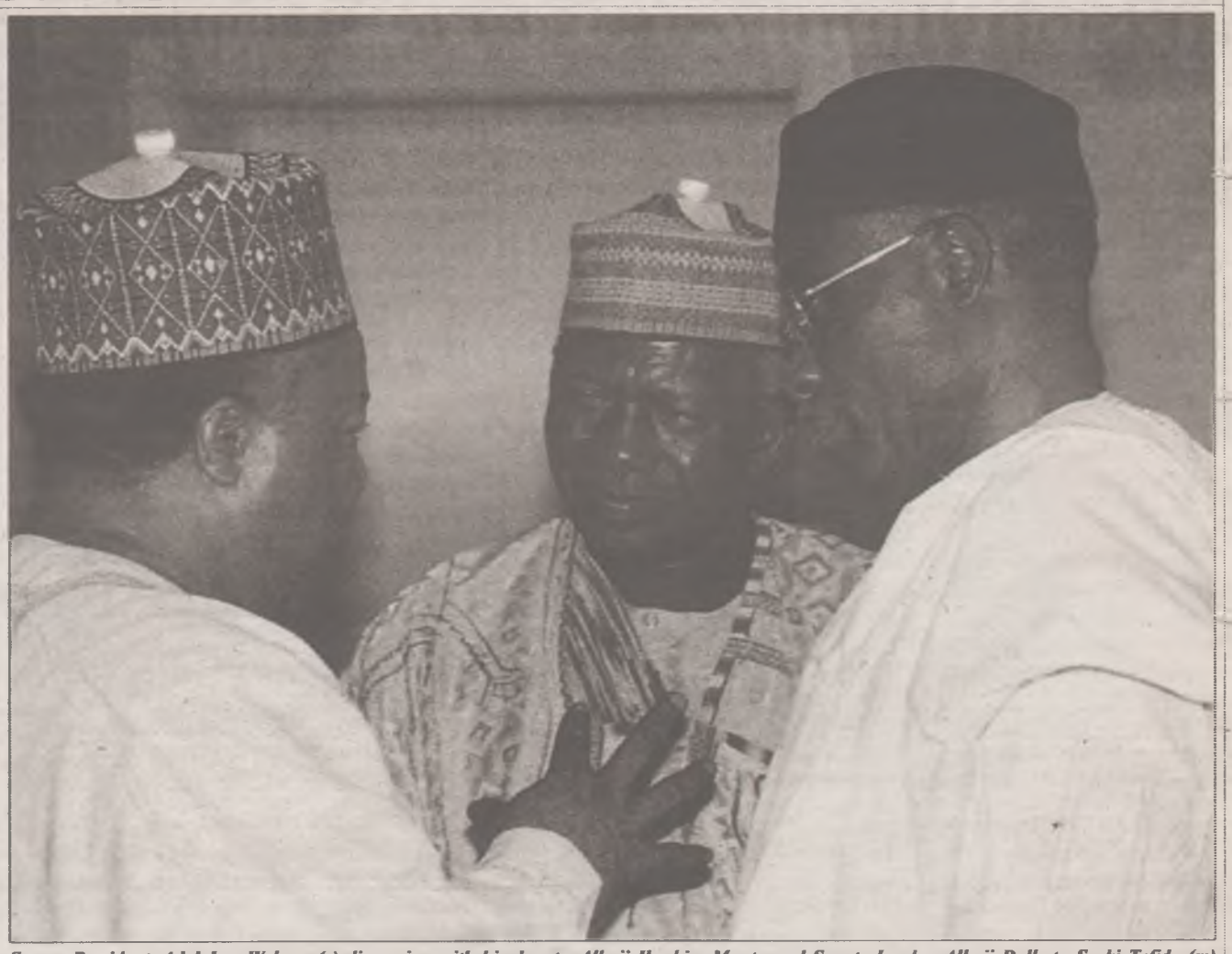
The Ekiti people in Oke Ero and Ekiti local governments were kicking against the call for a new state with 18 councils in Kwara state.

Olosi of Osi, Oba Saliu Adasofegbe, told newsmen at the weekend in Ilorin that proposed Osin State was not in the interest of Ekitis.

He said: "Obviously, peace, love, equity and justice for our continuous togetherness has been jettisoned with the memorandum."

The Obas said the Ekiti people were snubbed in the planning and evolvement of the document.

"We and our people say that we are currently satisfied with the present Kwara state as it is now constituted," he said.



Senate President, Adolphus Wabara (r) discussing with his deputy, Alhaji Ibrahim Mantu and Senate Leader, Alhaji Dalhatu Sarki Tafida (m) during the senate president's roundtable on debt, development and democracy held at the Nicon Hilton Hotel Abuja ...recently. Pix: Joe Oroye.

Rep flays Obasanjo over bribery scandal

From Olumide Bajulaiye, *Correspondent (Lagos)*

In a show of solidarity with the National Assembly leadership in the N55million bribery scandal, an Alliance fro Democracy (AD) member in the House of Representatives, Mr. Wunmi Bewaji has condemned President Olusegun Obasanjo for selective exposure and trial saying the whole idea was a third term ambition.

Bewaji, the AD leader in the House of Representatives made the condemnation at the weekend in Lagos during presentation of scholarship award to 26 Lagos students who won the 2005 annual Wunmi Bewaji Foundation for educational development in the state.

The AD leader warned Nigerians not to be fooled by the exposure and "television trial" of some members of the upper chamber, saying Obasanjo is fond of coming up with spurious allegation against the parliament to wreck it, noting that continuous selective attack on members of the National Assembly is dangerous for the nation's nascent democracy.

"What is not acceptable to us is selective justice style being used by the Federal Government. But one thing I am happy about is that you will notice that AD member in the National assembly is involved in the corruption scandal," Bewaji said.

Hon. Bewaji however, noted that the N55 million scandal involving the Senate President, Adolphus Wabara has "Satanic Implications" even as he said it was an abuse of the office of the senate president.

He said the difference between the military and democracy was the existence of the parliament, "the parliament is supposed to check the excesses of the executive and to do it well they must step on toes. This is why the executive has come up with means of scandalising the parliament," he noted.

The chieftain advised further that if anything was suspected at all, the court is there, we should abide with rule of law, they should be charged to court and not for a president to embark on television trial telling the whole world that leadership of our national assembly is corrupt. "When you prejudice fair trial, you modelled up the judiciary and prevent the judges from doing their job," he stressed.

Bribery saga: I'm not surprised -*ANPP chieftain*

Chief Emeka Chukwu, a chieftain of ANPP in Abia, has said that he is not surprised at the bribery scandal involving the National Assembly and the Federal Ministry of Education.

"I am not in any way surprised. It is just that some good people are being roped into the entire rubbish, but that is what they deserve," Chukwu told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) today in Umuahia.

"Until everyone of them get enmeshed in this whole corruption this country will know no peace. We know how they won their so-called election. It was through corrupt practices," he added.

He said that the current campaign against corruption was a facade, noting that asking the Deputy Senate President, Alhaji Ibrahim Mantu, to preside over the investigation was not sincere.

Chukwu urged the federal government to demonstrate more sincerity in the fight against corruption by treating everyone affected equally, stressing that it would not be enough to humiliate those alleged to be involved in the present case.

He said that it might just be sufficient to ask Chief Adolphus Wabara to resign as leader of the National Assembly if he was found guilty, adding: "I think that resignation is good enough, I would not want anything more than resignation for the senate president."

Chukwu dismissed the view that the current scandal impugned on the integrity of the Igbos, saying: "It is a bad omen for an Igbo in PDP to aspire to rule this country."

"An Igbo who is not in PDP will continue to live an honest life because the Igbos are honest people who after all they went through during the civil war bounced back, that was an economic wonder," he said.

He said that he was not worried that two of the principal suspects were from Abia, adding that when people were not given a free hand to choose their leaders, incidents such as that are bound to happen.

"It is just a coincidence that it has happened and I am from Abia," Chukwu said, adding that "it is not the tendencies of the Abia man or Umuahia man to do things that way."

Meanwhile, In Aba, which is part of Wabara's constituency, the bribery saga dominated group discussions in bars and market places with some jubilating that Wabara deserved the fate that had befallen him.

A man, who claimed to have worked "assiduously for Wabara in 1999," when we converted his local government chairmanship campaign posters for his senatorial election campaign, described him as "an ingrate."

He, like many, accused the senate president of not reaching out to his constituents since he was elected.

Bucknor, Babatunde join PDP

The former Deputy Governor of Lagos State, Sen. Kofoworola Bucknor and a one time.

Head of Service in the state, Rafiu Babatunde have joined the PDP.

The duo along with a one time Commissioner for Commerce and Industry in the state, Chief Abiola Johnson were at the Ota farm to pay homage on President Olusegun Obasanjo.

They were led there by the Lagos State PDP Chairman, Alhaji Muhammad Murtala and the Deputy National Chairman South West, Chief Olabode George, who said Lagosians were tired of Tinubu's deception.

"Lagosians are tired of the deception by Tinubu for almost six years in office and with nothing to show for it," George told NAN at the end of the meeting with Obasanjo.

"Our people are just coming to terms with reality," he said, adding that early in April a huge rally will be held to welcome many more Lagosians to the PDP.

George said that the case for the release of funds for Lagos local councils was just being over-politicised by Tinubu and his government.

He said that funds for the legitimate 20 council areas were regularly being released for collection at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), but the 20 councils were not there to collect.

In place of those councils, are 57 new ones that were not recognised by the constitution, he said, adding that the old 20 councils must be restored and fresh elections held there.

Sen. Saraki makes case for tourism

By Isa Sanusi, *Senior Political Reporter*

Senator Gbemi Saraki has called on the federal government to develop other economically potential sectors of the economy to reduce over dependence of on the oil sector saying that the nation will earn a lot from the tourism sector of developed.

The lawmaker, who made a case for tourism development on the floor of the senate stated that "for too long tourism in Nigeria has been in the doldrums. The major obstacle to the growth and development of the industry is lack of infrastructure and especially standardisation of its service providers."

Senator Saraki noted that diversifying the economy would reduce the tension caused by the jostle for control of economic resources pointing out that tourism represents one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world.

"The industry is reputed to be the biggest contributor to global foreign exchange earning. For instance, in the United Kingdom, tourism is one of the largest industries. Even Ghana earned 448 million pound sterling from tourism in 2001."

She also urged the upper chamber to consider giving legal backing to national tourism development corporation to create enabling environment for the growths of the tourism industry.

Sports

WOLRD CUP QUALIFIERS

Diouf leads Premiership goal parade

El-Hadji Diouf scored twice as Senegal crushed Liberia 6-1 to strengthen their chance of a second consecutive World Cup appearance.

The former African Footballer of the Year marked his first appearance for the Teranga Lions in the 2006 qualifying competition with a goal in each half as the weakened visitors were ripped apart in Dakar.

Diouf was one of four English Premiership footballers to hit the target with Bolton Wanderers team-mate Khalilou Fadiga, Amdy Faye of Newcastle United and Henri Camara of Southampton also scoring.

Moussa Ndiaye from French outfit Istres was the other marksman for Senegal, who lead Group 1 on goal difference from Zambia after an indifferent start to their 10-match campaign nearly cost French coach Guy Stephan his job.

Senegal were the surprise packets of the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea , stunning defending champions France 1-0 in the opening match and taking Turkey to extra time before bowing out in the quarter-finals.

A shortage of funds left new Liberia coach Joseph Sayon without most of the experienced foreign-based professionals who form the backbone of the Lone Stars squad.

And they were six goals behind in the Senegalese capital before Oliver Makor scored a consolation goal for the country that came agonisingly close to pipping, mighty Nigeria for a place at the previous World Cup.

But thoughts of competing in Germany next year have long vanished from the minds of Liberians, who were suffering their fourth loss in five qualifiers after celebrating a win over Mali in the opening round.

Senegal (plus nine goal difference) and Zambia (plus four) have 13 points each and Togo (plus four) can join them if they complete a double over Mali by winning in Bamako Sunday.

Fadiga, whose career was in jeopardy last year due to a heart condition, broke the deadlock midway through the first half by converting a free kick awarded for a foul on Diouf by goalkeeper Lartee Jackson.

Diouf converted a late first half penalty after Mamadou Niang was fouled and the floodgates opened after half-time with Senegal scoring regularly to emphasise their dominance over opponents they whipped 3-0 in Monrovia last October.

Zambia scored early and late first half goals to defeat Congo 2-0 in the northern mining town of Chililabombwe and maintain their challenge for a first appearance at the quadrennial showcase of international football.

Midfielder Elijah Tana struck in the first minute and was also cautioned before prolific scorer Collins Mbesuma from South African champions Kaizer Chiefs added the second after a swarm of bees entered the ground forcing a six-minute delay.

Striker Dennis Oliech became the leading scorer in the African qualifiers with six goals when he struck the winner as Kenya edged Botswana 1-0 in a Group 5 Nairobi clash.

Oliech caused endless headaches for the Zebras as Kenya dominated and his goal arrived on the stroke of half-time when he headed in a Zablon Amanake cross to the relief of new coach Mohamed Kheri.

Kenya have changed coaches twice in five World Cup qualifiers and Kheri needed a police escort after the Harambee-Stars were held at home by Rwanda in a recent warm-up.

Midfielder Steven Pienaar scored after 72 minutes to give lacklustre Group 2 leaders South Africa a 2-1 win over bottom-of-the-table Uganda in a Johannesburg showdown that never rose above the mediocre.



Tiger Woods chips on to the 16th green during the second round at The Players Championship in Ponte Vedra Bench, Florida, USA ...yesterday

Mirosevic misses open goal

...as Chile are held by Uruguay

Midfielder Milovan Mirosevic made up for one of the misses of the year by scoring Chile's equaliser in a 1-1 draw with Uruguay in a World Cup qualifier on Saturday.

Mario Regueiro pounced on a blunder by defender Pablo Contreras to fire Uruguay ahead in the fourth minute of a fiercely competitive match played at a breathtaking pace.

Argentine-based Mirosevic equalised two minutes into the second half, atoning for an astonishing miss midway through the first period.

Mauricio Pinilla pulled the ball across from the byline and the Racing Club player, under no pressure and needing only to tap the ball in from one metre, somehow shot wide.

Uruguay, who have made a steady recovery after a poor run earlier this year, stayed fifth in the 10-nation South American qualifying group with 15 points from 12 games, one ahead of their opponents.

The visitors made the perfect start when Villarreal striker Diego Forlan broke down the left and crossed into the penalty area. Contreras miskicked his clearance and the ball landed at the feet of Regueiro, who converted from 10 metres.

Uruguay missed two good chances to increase their lead while Regueiro had a 30-metre drive tipped over by Nelson Tapia.

Chile also created chances. Luis Fuentes headed wide and Uruguay goalkeeper Sebastian Viera struggled to turn around an awkward shot from Mark Gonzalez.

Chile, who have won only one match at home, equalised almost immediately after the restart when Jorge Valdivia played a one-two with Marcelo Salas and found Mirosevic, who made no mistake from six metres.

Forlan flicked a close-range shot wide on the hour for Uruguay and Valdivia also rifled a long-range effort over the bar.

Fernandes goal spurs Portugal to victory over Canada

Midfielder Manuel Fernandes scored his first international goal to set Portugal on their way to a 4-1 win over Canada in a friendly warm-up on Saturday for their World Cup qualifier with Slovakia next week.

Slovakia pulled level with Portugal at the top of European Group Three on 13 points with a 2-1 away win over Estonia on Saturday.

Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, whose side travel to Bratislava to play Slovakia on Wednesday, recalled Fernandes to replace the injured Armando Petit.

Portugal began impressively with two goals in four minutes, but as the game progressed they failed to convert a series of chances into goals until near the end.

The 19-year-old Fernandes opened the scoring with a strike from outside the area after eight minutes.

Four minutes later, striker Pauleta doubled the lead tapping in a left cross from defender Nuno Valente.

Substitute striker Helder Postiga added the third goal when he headed in a left cross by Luis Boa Morte after 82 minutes.

Canada scored their consolation goal through Kevin McKenna in a goalmouth scramble five minutes from the end.

In injury time, substitute striker Nuno Gomes, with a shot inside box, put the result beyond doubt with the fourth goal.

Football prevailed over altitude -*Pekerman*

Argentina coach Jose Pekerman said soccer beat altitude when his team overcame Bolivia 2-1 in a World Cup qualifier at 3,600 metres above sea level on Saturday.

"Football prevailed over altitude," Pekerman told reporters after his youthful, second-string side kept Argentina top of the 10-nation South American qualifying group.

"The secret was to keep the ball and pass it around with tranquility," said Pekerman after his team came from behind to win with goals by Luciano Figueroa and Luciano Galletti.

"The merit was in the team's attitude. 'Obviously, we can get excited about the win but we mustn't get carried away because we still haven't qualified.

"The team finished in one piece. We showed a great mentality."

Ovidio Messa, in his first game as Bolivia coach, said Argentina deserved their victory.

"It was a fair result," he said. "We made too many mistakes in defence and they took advantage."

PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS

Gombe United	1,	Kwara United	0
Kano Pillars	1,	Wikki Tourists	0
Sharks	3,	Gateway	0
Gabros	1,	Dolphin	2
Nasarawa Utd.	0	Enyimba	1
Zamfara Utd.	1	Elkanemi	0

Belgium back on track, says Buffel

After easing past Bosnia 4-1 on Saturday, Belgian goalscorer Thomas Buffel says his team will sacrifice a similar scoreline for the three points against San Marino.

Belgium visit Group Seven's bottom side on Wednesday looking to further boost their outside hopes of reaching the World Cup after an inconsistent start to their qualifying campaign has left them fourth on just four points from four games.

"A win is what we need and a win is what we are aiming to come away with. The number of goals doesn't matter. 1-0 will do us," the Rangers midfielder Buffel said.

Belgium got an early scare on Saturday when Bosnia's Zlatan Bajramovic scored after just 40 seconds but striker Emile Mpenza netted two, Koen Daerden scored just before the break and Buffel rounded off the win with 14 minutes remaining.

"When we conceded the goal so early, it was a shock to our system and was a test of our mental strength. After that we played very well as a team," Buffel explained.

Belgium's first win of the campaign eased the pressure on under-pressure coach Aime Anthuenis.

"Hopefully this has got the public and press of our back and the manager's back for the moment. But we have to follow up on Wednesday. We have confidence in our manager and in ourselves that we can get back into the tournament," defender Peter Van der Heyden said.

Bosnia boss Blaz Sliskovic believes nothing less than a win at home to Lithuania on Wednesday will do if his side are to have any chance of qualification.

"The Lithuania game is the most crucial game for us. If we lose, we are out. It's that simple," Sliskovic said.

"Belgium are a better team than us and they played very well. We were in control for the first five minutes. After that we collapsed and our defending was not good."



Thomas Buffel

Sports

Robben injury overshadows Dutch win

The impressive 2-0 win by the Netherlands in Romania on Saturday was overshadowed by an injury to Chelsea winger Arjen Robben, who came off after 25 minutes of the World Cup qualifying Group One match.

Philip Cocu nodded in Robben's corner after 38 seconds and 18-year-old Ryan Babel crowned his debut when he settled the match with five minutes remaining to keep the Dutch on top of the group with 13 points.

Robben, who injured his left ankle and knee when he jumped to avoid clashing with Romania's Bogdan Lobont when the keeper came out to clear the ball, is doubtful for Wednesday's home qualifier against Armenia in Eindhoven.

"I don't think the injuries are that bad but the game on Wednesday may come too soon," Robben told reporters on Sunday.

The 21-year-old winger, who missed three of the last four qualifiers and had only just returned to action after breaking his foot playing for Chelsea in February, was scheduled to have an MRI scan later on Sunday.

AZ Alkmaar winger Martijn Meerdink, who tore knee ligaments on Thursday, has already been ruled out of this week's match against Armenia.

On a positive note, the inexperienced Dutch defence again impressed by preventing the Romanians from creating any clear cut opportunities.

The Netherlands employed the same back line as last month's friendly against England with Khalid Boulahrouz winning his fifth cap and Alkmaar pair Jan Kromkamp and Joris Mathijsen making their third appearances.

"This new defence still surprises me but they did very well," said keeper Edwin van der Sar, who is three matches away from a century of international caps.

"They need coaching but that pleases me because it keeps me concentrated on the match.

"We didn't show enough football and used the long ball too much but later in both halves we regained control."

The win over Romania brought the team closer to the finals next year in Germany, a country where the Netherlands achieved their greatest footballing successes in reaching the World Cup final in 1974 and winning the 1988 European Championships.

"This is a great result...we are on our way now with a good squad," said coach Marco van Basten.



Robben injury has overshasowed Holland's impressive 2 - 0 victory over Romania

Internal competition sets England on qualifying roll

England will pick up another three easy points against Azerbaijan on Wednesday if they reproduce the form of their World Cup qualifying rout of Northern Ireland.

Saturday's 4-0 victory at Old Trafford, albeit against weak opposition, left little margin for criticism as Sven-Goran Eriksson's men bolstered their position at the top of Group Six.

Teenage striker Wayne Rooney and midfielder Joe Cole produced two superb performances during a second-half goal rush that swept the Irish away.

Provided England avoid any complacency in Newcastle against an Azerbaijan side who were battered 8-0 by Poland on Saturday, they should take the points and whittle away at the Poles' superior goal difference.

Eriksson was entitled to a double celebration after his 50th game in charge as victory was coupled with a credible answer to England's longstanding problem on the left side.

Cole may prefer to play in central midfield but he is more than willing to sacrifice that preference to become an England regular in the position where they have least depth.

Playing under Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho this season, the 23-year-old has matured into a disciplined all rounder who no longer gives the ball away in dangerous situations.

On Saturday he also showed the ability to win back possession and was selfless in trying to set up his team mates in scoring situations.

Operating alongside club mate Frank Lampard — England's best midfielder for the last year — Cole's natural trickery is another reason for Eriksson to be optimistic about next year's finals in Germany.

To have a second ball-player alongside Rooney, whose brilliance set up England's third goal on Saturday, is a surfeit of riches.

England were crying out for one, let alone two, when their last World Cup campaign foundered at the quarter-final stage against Brazil.

The few concerns that were raised on Saturday regarded England's other two midfielders, captain David Beckham and Steven Gerrard.

Having played so often for Real Marid in central midfield, Beckham has developed a continental drift that pulls him away from his designated zone on the right, exposing that flank to counter-attack.

Further back, Gerrard's attacking skills are being sacrificed in a holding role in front of England's back four, a high price to be paid for allowing Lampard freedom to get forward.

Lampard's goal on Saturday brought his tally to seven in his last 13 games — a decent international strike rate for a centre-forward let alone a central midfielder.

Eriksson's master-plan is that Lampard and Gerrard should alternate the attacking and defending duties between themselves. In practice, though, Gerrard is a far more incisive tackler and Lampard has a better eye for goal.

England are the winners in this kind of internal competition, just as the midfield vacancy brought out the best in Cole on Saturday and John Terry's cool display in central defence strengthened his own case.

Terry knows that Eriksson's sense of loyalty will probably prevent him from dropping Sol Campbell as Rio Ferdinand's partner when the Arsenal man returns from injury.

But the Chelsea captain is right to think he can make that decision a more painful one.

Lippi to experiment with Udinese trio

Italy coach Marcello Lippi has opted to rest the bulk of the side which beat Scotland 2-0 on Saturday, naming an experimental squad for Wednesday's friendly with Iceland.

After the World Cup qualifying win at the San Siro, which came via two free-kicks from Andrea Pirlo, Inter defender Marco Materazzi is the only player from Serie A's 'big three' still in the squad for the game which will be played in Padova.

There are no players from AC Milan or Juventus in the 19-man squad and Lippi will give debuts to three uncapped players from Udinese.

Midfielder Gianpiero Pinzi and strikers Vincenzo Iaquinta and David Di Michele have all been called into the Azzurri squad for the first time.

None of Italy's three forwards who started against Scotland, Roma pair Francesco Totti and Antonio Cassano and Parma's Alberto Gilardino, have been named in the squad.

Lecce's attacking right-back Marco Cassetti, linked with a possible move to AC Milan, has also been given his first call-up.

Henry still uncertain for Israel qualifier, says Domenech

France coach Raymond Domenech admitted that star striker Thierry Henry was fit to play against Switzerland in their group four 2006 World Cup qualifier but was sidelined to avoid any risk of injury.

Switzerland escaped with a lucky 0-0 draw at the Stade de France as a Henry-less France team failed to convert a series of golden scoring opportunities.

The result left the former world and European champions in second place in the group, behind Ireland, and ahead of Israel with all teams on nine points after five matches.

Henry was among a few players who were fighting for match fitness, but Domenech said he did not want to risk the Arsenal striker who had picked up a calf strain when they crashed out of the Champions League at the hands of Bayern Munich two weeks ago.

"It was me who decided not to take the risk," conceded Domenech, who has not seen France win at home in the three World Cup qualifiers they have played at the Stade de France so far.

"Titi (Henry) wanted to take the risk but I refused because it might have left him becoming unavailable for another month, which would be stupid."

Domenech added: "We did a scan which showed that he really didn't have anything wrong with him. And he trained for the match more or less like the rest of the squad.

"But for me, he was still a little short (of match fitness)."

France will now play Israel on Wednesday hopping to claim their third away win of the qualifying campaign, having beaten the Faroe Islands and Cyprus on their previous trips.

However Domenech said Henry is still uncertain for the match in Tel Aviv, against an Israeli team which held group leaders the Republic of Ireland to a 1-1 draw on Saturday.

"There's no guarantee he will play on Wednesday. This morning (Sunday) he was with the physiotherapist again. We'll have a training session on Monday, then we'll see on Tuesday after the final training session."

Whatever happens with Henry, France have to get their qualifying campaign back on track.

Group four has emerged as one of the tightest of the eight in the Europe zone of qualifying. With Ireland, France and Israel all on nine points, Switzerland - who have six but a game in hand - remain in contention.

Marlet to replace injured Govou

France coach Raymond Domenech on Sunday called up Olympique Marseille striker Steve Marlet to replace injured Sidney Govou for Wednesday's World Cup Group qualifier against Israel on Wednesday.

It is the first time the 31-year-old Marlet has been picked by Domenech, who took over the team after last year's European championship.

Striker Thierry Henry is still nursing the calf strain that kept him of Saturday's goalless home draw with Switzerland and remains doubtful for the match in Tel Aviv, Domenech said.

"He is recovering. There is a training session on Monday and a last one on Tuesday. We will see what is his shape by then," Domenech said.

Sports

V/MOBILE/ABRAKA POLO

Ashton Wells win Ahmadu Yakubu Cup

By Ismaila Umaru Lere,
Group Sports Editor

As this year's Vmobile/Abaka International polo tournament heats up, one of the Cups on offer, Ahmadu Yakubu Cup, has been lost and won. In a highly explosive encounter, team Ashton Wells defeated team Veego by 6 goals to 5 to record the first victory in this year's tournament.

Parading a combined handicap 11 players, the Yinka Akinkugbe-captained Ashton Wells fielded former Lagos Finance Commissioner, Wale Edun +1, Ibrahim Mohammed (Dan guy) +4, and Bruno Ciponeri + 4, while team Veego had patron of Abraka Turf, Prince Albert Esiri, Musa Yahaya, Hamisu Buba, and Bashir Musa.

Speaking on how his team emerged tops, Kunle Akinkugbe noted that although his team was slightly better, but Bruno's familiarity with the turf was an advantage to his team, as this made him to be more comfortable in handling his opponents.

He gave kudos to Vmobile and the organizers for improving on the standard of the tournament this year.

"Without any doubt the tournament has been improving every year. Although it is gradual and systematic, it's no doubt netter organized this year. The facilities are better, even the crowd is great. I can see some of them playing polo in the near future, because they are taking great interest in the game.

"Delta State has a thick attraction in the future, in no time it's going to become one of the nicest tournament in the world", Akinkugbe said.

Earlier in the day, team Xenon had played team Trafigura for Patron's Cup. The march witnessed a back to back score line until few minutes to the end of the four-Chukker match, when Dawule Baba netted in the winning goal and left the score at 9° to 8 in favour of the Xenon. In the match played for the same Cup the previous day, Trafigura defeated Goodfellows by 9 goals to 6. In addition, MRS beat Ashbert Raiders by 6 goals to 4° in the opening match for International Gold Cup.

Vmobile/Abraka International tournament is an annual polo event played on the turf of Abraka town. The tournament began on Friday, March 25 and ends today.

Violence mars Tornadoes win

Host team Niger Torna does 2-0 home win over Lobi Stars on Saturday was marred by crowd trouble at the Ba Kontagora Stadium in Mi forcing the game to be held up for several minutes.

Just ten minutes into the game, police fired tear gas at the fans after they violently protested against the arrest of a supporter and the Premier League fixture was held up for over 10 minutes.

Last season the Bako Kontagora Stadium was banned for several weeks and Tornadoes banished from their home ground after crowd trouble.

It was a match high-riding Lobi could have got something out of but for poor finishing.

Tornadoes goals all came from the penalty spot, one in the first half and the other late in the second 45 minutes. Former Kano Pillars star Clement Ogiji scored both goals.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Bridge Boys grind Rangers 3-0

A deserving Julius Berger side claimed all the points at stake when they bashed visiting Enugu Rangers 3-0 in a Premier League match played at the MKO Abiola Stadium, Abeokuta on Saturday.

An early goal scored by Kehinde Lasisi in the seventh minute set the tone for the home team, who made no pretensions about their determination to carry the day.

The left sided midfielder had won an aerial contest against the Rangers' central defensive pair of Kabiru and Efugh to nod in a free kick from the left, beating Oluwaniyi to the far left of the post.

Before then, the visitors had fluffed a golden chance to open scoring when Sam Ledor shot over the bar from a corner kick. Rangers fought back but their forward line led by Edward Ofere were bereft of ideas in the vital area.

Berger showed more hunger though, and not too long after, they began to assert their superiority in the middle of the pack as Yusuf Jaiyeola, Oseni Jimoh and Sodiq Dabiri held sway.

Just before half time, another invasion by the home team saw Dabiri going one on one with Rangers keeper Segun Oluwaniyi. Both players clashed, and in the ensuing struggle, Oluwaniyi picked up the ball while Dabiri went sprawling. Referee Olajumu went on to award a penalty against the keeper.

After a mild protest from Rangers players and officials, Alaba Balogun stepped up to convert the kick for Berger's second goal of the afternoon.

The second half began with Berger calling the shots, as Oluwaniyi was again called to duty, saving a ferocious free kick taken by Isaac Mbaegbu.

The Bridge Boys stepped up the tempo again and within the next two minutes, Lasisi lost a couple of chances when he first hit the side netting from Babatunde Yusuf's right wing pull out, then missing Aminu Sanusi's through pass by the whiskers.

On the hour, they finally got it right when Foster Amadi cracked home a fierce shot to Oluwaniyi's left side after displacing Kabiru Mohammed.

Both sides exhausted their quota of substitutions, but the game was already won and lost as Rangers played one of their worst games in the history of the Premier League.

Coach of Julius Berger, Fatai Amoo told KICK OFF that he considered the 3-0 score line 'a miracle.'

"I give glory to God for the victory because it's not easy beating a team of Rangers' calibre by such a high margin. I see it as a miracle! Nevertheless my boys played well and deserved the victory," he said.

His Rangers counterpart, Lawrence Akpokona attributed his team's poor showing to the absence of several of his regulars through injury.

3SC pip Nationale

Injury-hit Shooting Stars Sports Club managed a 1-0 victory over a not too impressive Inwuayanwu Nationale at the Lekan Salami Stadium on Saturday courtesy of lone strike from left full back Taiwo Ajibola, who curled home a direct free-kick from the edge of the box after only 12 minutes of action.

The home team started the game on a fast tempo dictating the tune of the match through Chidi Oji, Soga Sambo from the midfield while Ajibola was outstanding in the match covering all blade of grass from his position.

The visitors were, however, reduced to 10 men in the 51st minute when the referee Faith Irabor issued a red card to former Super Eagles player, Romanus Orjinta for dissent after she stopped a goal-bound Nationale move.

The visitors fought for an equalizer through Isaac Fache, Mangut Mbawas and Amanse Elekwachi, but poor marksmanship robbed them of a goal.

Ever impressive Oji also took a shot that was twice saved by the Nationale goal-keeper Longinus Duru in the 68th minute. While Soga lost what could have been a second goal for 3SC when his 89th minute header missed target narrowly.

Nationale coach Alfred Ekundina cleverly avoided journalists after the match when he failed to show up at the post match press conference.

3SC coach Godfrey Esu blamed injury for his team's not too impressive performance against Nationale.

"Some of my boys were injured in the Benin match against Insurance. Kola Ige has not fully recovered from the back injury he suffered in Benin. I just risked playing him in today's match. Seyi Ogunsanya has a toe injury which he played with while Chijioke Orjiakor who also played in today's match is just recovering from malaria," Esu offered.

"We will play better against Elkanemi Warriors in Maiduguri in our next match when I hope all my regular players would be very fit. Some teams have picked a point in Maiduguri and I am confident we can achieve same there. We could have played a draw game in Benin if not for the referee who did everything to stop us."

Westwood a winner, despite rain

Britain's Lee Westwood was probably the only competitor at the rain-hit Players Championship not too upset when second round play was halted on Saturday because of thunderstorms.

For the Englishman, the timing could hardly have been better as he was able to return to the clubhouse in time to listen to radio commentary as one of his horses won $150,000 in a race at the Dubai World Cup.

The horse, Right Approach, finished third in the Dubai Duty Free over 1:8 km.

"I was probably the only person pleased to come in off the golf course because I got to listen to it (the race)," said Westwood. "The weather fitted in just right for my horse racing.

"We thought he was going to win, but race horses are like golfers — you're never sure how they're going to come out of the stalls.

"Hopefully the horse comes out of the race all right, just fit and ready to go again in the near future. But third was good, it pays for its hay."

Westwood's good fortune carried over to the Stadium Course at the TPC at Sawgrass when play eventually resumed, a three-under-par 69 earning him a share of the early lead with American Joe Durant (65) at 10-under 134.

However, half the field were still out on the course when second-round play ended for the day in fading light.

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Sports

WORLD CUP CRACKER

Why I removed Utaka, Martins — Chukwu

Super Eagles chief coach, Christian Chukwu has explained why he made the substitutions in the Eagles 2- 0 victory over the Panthers of Gabon in the Germany 2006 World Cup/ Nations Cup qualifier in Saturday.

Chairman removed John Utaka for Yakubu Aiyegbeni in the 70th minute, while Kanu Nwankwo came in for Obafemi Martins eight minutes later, to the consternation and annoyance of fans, who wondered why Julius Aghahowa was left on the pitch only for the enterprising duo to be substituted.

From AbdulRaheem Aodu, *Sports Reporter in Port Harcourt*

Chukwu however, disclosed to Trustsports that his decision was as a result of the inability of the two players to play according to his instructions.

"The Gabonese came to play a defensive game and we have to find a way to open their defense. So in the second half I asked Okocha to drop further back to a deep role from where he was now able to lay his passes, while we now worked through the wings. That explained why our midfield seemed to collapse.

"We had to make the substitutions as the pla-yers were not playing ac-cording to the instructions given to them, you will notice that when we brought in Kanu the game changed and we got the goals."

The introduction of Yusuf Atanda Ayila for workaholic Garba Lawal however, was not due to Lawal's inadequacies but to allow the Dynamo Kiev youngster made his debut.



Julius Aghahowa challenges Gabon's Mounbounga Roaurgue during their African zone World Cup qualifier in Port Harcourt on Saturday.

F/Eagles open camp this week — Galadima

The Nigerian Flying Eagles' belated preparations for the 2005 World Youth Championship slated for Holland will kick off in earnest this week, as NFA concludes arrangement for camping venue for the youth team.

NFA chairman, Alhaji Ibrahin Galadima told *Trustsports* in Port Harcourt on Saturday, that the delay in the preparation of the Samson Siasia tutored team was due to the lack of response from the Cross River State government.

Galadima said the Cross River state government was approached to assist in hosting the team's camping in the sate but so far there has been no response. He however added that efforts are being intensified to ensure that the team opens its cam-ping this week.

"The Flying Eagles camp will open next (this) week by the grace of God. We have been waiting for the Cross

River state government to respond to our approach but we have not gotten any response that was what caused the delay. But we are now looking for an alternative venue for the team to begin its camping.

"The camp will begin God's willing by the end of this month (March) at the latest first week of next month April."

The U-21 national team opens its junior World Cup against Brazil on June 11.

Kanu magic stops Gabon

It needed the magic of Nwankwo Kanu to give the Super Eagles a 2-0 home victory over a determined Panthers of Gabon in a decisive World Cup tie at the Liberation Stadium in Port Harcourt on Saturday.

The hard-won victory has now propelled Nigeria to the top of Group 4 of the African zone of the 2006 World Cup, which also serves as a qualifying tournament for next year's African Nations Cup.

However, the highly fancied Nigerian super stars had to wait till seven minutes to the end before they could celebrate a goal through Shakhtar Donetsk striker Julius Aghahowa, who headed home from the near post off a cross from the right by substitute Nwankwo Kanu.

Three minutes later Kanu proved to be a super sub as he connected home a low cross by Portsmouth striker Yakubu Aiyegbeni to double Nigeria's lead.

Nigeria have now recorded 13 points from six matches while erstwhile leaders Angola with 11 points and a game in hand face a tricky trip to Zimbabwe on Sunday.

Gabon are third in the six-team group with six points. Algeria and Rwanda are the other teams in the group.

However, this was by no means an easy game for the Eagles as a highly determined

Gabonese side took in everything they threw at them for most part of the game before Aghahowa finally broke the deadlock to the great relief of a jammed Liberation Stadium.

The home team employed the long ball tactic but this was often effectively dealt with by a youthful Gabonese side, who were fired up to get a result away from home after both teams had played out a 1-1 draw in October in Libreville.

Gabon completely cut off the Nigerian attack led by Inter Milan striker Obafemi Martins, who missed the biggest chance of the night on 66 minutes when he shot wide in front of an open goal after some good work down the left flank by Lens forward John Utaka.

Aghahowa also came close to finding the back of the net in the 53rd and 59th minutes but Gabon goalkeeper Ovomo Ebang first blocked his effort with his feet while the Nigerian striker's other attempt narrowly missed target.

In a goalless first half, Gabon took the kick-off and to their credit they went straight into attack as their hosts struggled to come to terms with the prevailing difficult weather conditions.

The Panthers tested Nigeria goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama early on before the Eagles gradually began to find their feet on a rain-soaked Liberation Stadium pitch.

Nigeria's first clear chance at goal came after 20 minutes when fullback Chidi Odiah thundered a shot from 25 yards which goalkeeper Ebang did well to save.

Ebang's reflexes were also fully tested on 33 minutes when he parried to safety Seyi Olofinjana's half volley from inside the box.

My boys lost concentration — Jairzinho

Panthers of Gabon technical adviser, Jairzinho has explained why his team fell to the Super Eagles of

Nigeria in the World Cup qualifier played at the Liberation Stadium Port Harcourt on Saturday.

The Brazilian coach, who came on board the team's technical crew recently, said his boys lost concentration in the dying minutes of the game adding that if not for that loss of focus, the Eagles would not have emerged victorious in the cracker.

Speaking through an interpreter, the former Brazil star said: "It is unfortunate that we lost the game, my boys lost concentration in the dying minutes of the game. We came here to play our soccer and to win but my players failed to play according to my instructions. We put in our best but we still lost, that is football."

The former World Cup star added that all hope is not lost, as they would continue with the battle for a

World Cup place, as well as a place in the African Cup of Nations billed for Egypt next year.

The Gabonese team left for Libreville Saturday night after the match.

RESULTS

World Cup Qualifiers

Zimbabwe	2,	Angola	0
Cote d'Ivoire	3,	Benin	0
Cameroon	2,	Sudan	1
Congo DR	1,	Ghana	1

CRUMBS

Overfilled stadium

The Liberation Stadium venue of the Super Eagles-Panthers match was filled to its 15,000 seating capacity by 5.00 pm, 2 hours to the kick off of the cracker. However it took the combined efforts of the stadium authorities and security men several minutes to finnel the gates close, as thousands of spectators battled to enter the stadium for the match. Over 5,000 spectators were left outside when the gates were finally closed.

Thunderous support for Eagles

Port Harcourt fans showed why Super Eagles prefer to play at the Liberation Stadium, as they supported the Nigerian team with tremendous and unrelenting ovation until the goals came. This is a departure from the attitude of many other fans across the country.

Foreign journalists' invation

The Eagles /Panther match was witnessed by armada of reporters from all over the world. 6 sports reporters came from Gabon, Congo sent one representative to give support to their Central African brothers. 8 journalists came in from London, while VOA, AFP and CSN were also ably represented. Nigerians however refused to be outdone, as over 200 Nigerian reporters watched the match live. The press gallery was of course jam packed throughout the game.

Yobo gets heroic welcome

Super Eagles defender, Joseph Yobo was given a heroic welcome back home just before the match. The Khana-born star, was welcomed with banners around the stadium by his local government chairman Barrister Kingsley Leh.

Kanu wins MVP, $3,000 prize

Gangling striker Kanu Nwankwo was named the man of the match following his winning goal and assist for Julius Aghahowa's goal. The West Brom of England star was presented with his with a trophy and Peak milk's $3,000 prize by Governor Peter Odili of Rivers State.

Late kick-off

Though, the pre match formalities started 5.55pm when the Panthers came in to inspect the pitch, the match did not start until 2 minutes after the scheduled 7.00 pm kick off time. This could have been due to the rain that started well ahead of the match.

This Space is for Sale

DAILY TRUST

MONDAY COLUMN

Monday, March 28, 2005

EDITORIAL

Foreign debt: Negotiation not repudiation

We suspect that even sensible creditors would see the logic in the recent motion by our House of Representatives asking the president to stop servicing Nigeria's eternally mind-boggling external debt. As patriotic citizens, we at Daily Trust are one with the House in this gallant attempt to redirect the enormous sums of money usually set aside to pay the interests and penalties that have accrued on the nation's debt to other areas of greater benefit to the people.

More to the point, regardless of what the terms of repayment may have been at the time the loans were obtained, there is something distinctly distasteful in paying back a borrowed sum over and over. According to the Debt Management Office, Nigeria's verifiable debt profile indicates that the total amount borrowed by the country which has been confirmed at this time stands somewhere in the region of $13.6 billion. This figure, we are made to understand, excludes commercial debts and perhaps guarantor-debts now supposedly payable by the country due to violations by the original borrowers who may or may not have been direct agents of the Nigerian state.

Of this $13.6 billion though, the palpable issue is that well over $42 billion has been paid by the country to its creditors. Yet, a sum in excess of $35 billion is said to be still outstanding. Again, despite what the original conditions of refund were, the objectionable exploitation evident in this circumstance seems to warrant all Nigerians throwing their weight behind the House of Representatives in this matter.

Moreover, even some notable individuals in the west are beginning to see that the perpetual state of calamity, in terms of poverty, poor infrastructure and general underdevelopment that exist in Africa, cannot be helped by an excruciating debt burden that is clearly impossible to ever pay off completely. For instance, Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director of The Earth Institute at Columbia University and Special Advisor on Millennium Development Goals to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, has argued that either creditors agree to write off Africa's debt or African nations should simply refuse as one to make further payments.

Perhaps of even greater significance in recent times, the British government, now in the chair of the rotating presidency of the Group of Eight which includes the G-7 (Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and United States of America) along with Russia, has called for outright cancellation of Africa's debt. Led by Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, the British government is urging creditors to forgive entirely Africa's $70 billion debt. Incidentally, it is significant that so far, the USA is the only outright opposition to this plan.

Nonetheless, it appears the most progressive way forward on the debt issue would be a negotiated compromise. Unilateral debt repudiation, however well-intentioned and no matter the pressing circumstances, may not serve our long-term interests in earnest, for there are various ways, like the balance of international trade payments system for instance, that creditor-nations or groups could use in forcing matters in their favour and to our detriment.

It is clear that the House of Representatives is sufficiently aware of this for, about the same time it passed the motion to stop debt servicing, it also approved a debt servicing sum of N355 billion for payment to creditor groups. Yet its call for debt repudiation is not entirely without merit. We believe what needs to be done is to pursue the matter in as responsible a manner as possible, perhaps through the African Union where Africa as a whole can act as one thereby ensuring a greater chance of success.

Furthermore, it must be obvious to all by now that without rapid industrialisation which would ensure a high degree of self-reliance, spurning the international trade system—which is one likely consequence of unilateral debt repudiation—may be a mirage that no amount of patriotic posturing would bring to fruition. To this end, this newspaper urges the House to do its best in encouraging rapid industrialisation of the country even as the government pursues the matter of debt relief or outright cancellation in the most pragmatic way.

2007: Here we go again

By Kabiru A. Yusuf
kabiruyusuf@dailytrust.com

It is inevitable that until Chief Olusegun Obasanjo has been safely escorted back to his Otta farm and another president installed at Aso rock, rumours about his intentions come 2007 would continue to make the rounds. There are political operators who will no doubt assume that Obasanjo needs to be second-guessed all the way to his exit, such is the reality of power in Africa. And do not be surprised that long after his retirement, sightings of his ghost hovering over the rocks around Aso would continue to be reported!

But the President's action and sayings are sometimes responsible for feeding the rumour mills. Recently in far-away Germany, the News Agency of Nigeria reported him saying



President Olusegun Obasanjo

"they keep worrying me, may be you should stay longer. But I believe our transition will not be complete without transiting from government to government and from one personality to another."

Obasanjo did not give away the identity of those urging him to stay longer. But even though he made it clear that he would not give in to such pressure, the fact there are people around him singing such siren songs is bad enough. Many Politicians have reacted to that confession from Germany. Among the most significant was that of Governor Makarfi of Kaduna State, who told Arewa Media Forum last week "it is not possible. I won't support it and I know Nigerians will not support it. I know the constitution cannot be amended to accommodate such idea. The people proposing the idea of the third term for Obasanjo are not fair to Nigerians. Nobody should listen to them."

So if like me you thought the speculation about a third term for President Obasanjo has been settled by his repeated insistence that he was looking forward to retirement, his off the cuff remarks that he was still under pressure to contest is open to several interpretations. Is it a Freudian slip or is Obasanjo trying to signal that he is still trying to keep his options open inspite of what he has said on this subject in the past?

Presidents have to deliver endless speeches and it is to be expected that often they say what they don't mean and mean what they don't say. But on important issues they weigh what they say because they know we are watching their lips. Right now nothing is more important than the transition to a post-Obasanjo era. If we succeed in this, then democracy will grow and become stronger. If we fail then the country may go into a tailspin.

The key to this is to persuade Obasanjo, that whoever it is that is putting pressure on him to contest again, Nigeria and Nigerians will be better off if he quits as scheduled. This is not to belittle his achievements, such as they are, or to ignore the importance of continuity in the reform programmes his government has introduced. Nor is one underestimating the daunting challenge of choosing a successor from the many claimants to the throne. But the road to the beginning of the end, in case there is anyone who remembers Tai Solarin's warning to General Yakubu Gowon in 1974, is to elevate the opinion of a small self-serving clique, above the feelings of a fundamental majority of Nigerians.

Presidents obviously get told what they want to hear. As a novice around power I got a memorable lesson in this one evening in 2002 when Obasanjo invited media owners to dinner at Aso rock. Tunji Oseni, then Presidential spokesperson said normally the President meets editors and media managers for occasional briefings. But this time around he wanted to meet publishers and owners of private television stations. We set out from Hilton Hotel in stretch limousines normally reserved for visiting dignitaries and were whisked to the front door of the Villa. The first surprise for me was that when Obasanjo came out to receive his guests his greeting was perfunctory, going down the line shaking hands with barely a grunt to each individual.

I mean I expected that while he may not remember small fries like me, he would be familiar with Emmanuel Iwuanyawu, publisher of *The Champion* newspapers, Segun Awolowo of the *Tribune*, Alhaji Murtala of Murhi Television and Chief Ogunsola of the *Punch*. But he gave us all the same treatment. As we moved to the dining table he did ask Mallam Ismaila Isa about progress on the National Children's Park and Zoo, which was then under construction. Otherwise he was reserved and formal, and it soon became clear that we were summoned to deliver up our opinions on whether or not he should contest the 2003 Presidential election.

Up to that point a crafty Obasanjo was saying he was undecided and was waiting on God to show him the way. But the senior members of our team, as if reading from the same script, told him that God had already spoken and that in the interest of Nigeria and the good work he was doing, he should throw his hat in the ring. Tellingly, Vice-president Atiku Abubakar was not invited to dinner, which was wise, because I'm not sure the guests could say in his presence what they did without choking on the food!

Anyway, since the elders have spoken, when it came to my turn I chose a different line of inquiry. I asked the President about the fate of two people, one a journalist, the other an Islamic cleric, who had been detained without trial. Obasanjo lost his temper and at a point actually directed a few choice Hausa words in my direction! The meeting ended on a colder note than it started and it was unclear what good it did in assisting the President to make up his mind.

It would be interesting what advice the same group would give to Obasanjo were he to consult them again on 2007. I believe that this time around it is we who will give him a frosty reception. For I doubt if there is any Nigerian who knows this country well—with the exception of those with delusions of power—who will recommend that the constitution of this country should be changed so that Obasanjo remains in power.

The task of building democracy, which we have barely begun, is to develop institutions not to prop up individuals. Whenever you hear that there is no alternative to a particular leader, you should know that an alternative is about to emerge. It is the good Lord's way of reminding us that only He has sovereignty, and that those with delusions of grandeur are heading underground. Remember Abacha!!

So my advice to Obasanjo is not to give up on the building of that Presidential library in Otta. It is a worthwhile venture, for we need many well-informed ex-presidents to guide our fragile polity. In fact I will argue that Obasanjo's contribution to returning Nigeria to democracy as an ex-military leader in the 1980's and 1990's, which led to his incarceration in Yola prison, may well be the highpoint of his career as a statesman. A brief stay in power, and a guided transfer to a younger man, would have enhanced his reputation and united and stabilized the country.

But of course we know that he rejected this so called Mandela option, may be because it was being aggressively promoted by the Vice-president's men. But to hang on to power under any pretext, after his legitimate two terms, is to risk destroying his reputation and damaging the country. The option of Otta, while quieter and less grandiose, is better than joining the league of African dictators who inevitably go down the drain with their countries.

Printed and published by Media Trust Nigeria Limited. **Corporate Office:** No. 22 Lusaka Street, Off Bissau Street, Wuse Zone 6 Abuja. Tel: 09 - 5235787, 5238726, Fax: 09 - 5238725. New fax number: 2721036. **Lagos Office:** News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) premises, National Theatre Complex, Iganmu. Tel: 01 - 4707296, 861008. **Kaduna Office:** No. 6, Sullubawa Close, Off Katuru Road, Unguwar Sarki, G.R.A. Kaduna Tel: 062 - 245916, Fax: 062 - 242496, **e-mail:** dailytrust@yahoo.co.uk or letters@weeklytrust.com. All correspondence to P.O.Box 6873, Wuse, Abuja. **Ag Editor:** Garba Deen Muhammad.