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INSECURITY

TOP GOVT OFFICIALS, MILITARY BRASS, OTHERS ACCUSED OF SABOTAGE



6 & 7

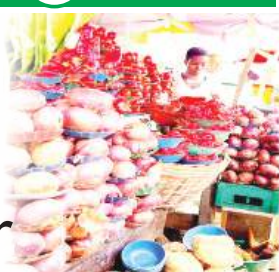
- Tinubu urged to expose, flush out bad eggs in upper security echelon, govt circles
- 'How terrorists, bandits, other criminals cross illegal weapons using govt vehicles'
- Lawyers want Tinubu to increase 2025 budget for security to 20%

Nigerians' appetite for foreign products to increase import bill from N34.4trn to N66.89trn in 2025 ⁴

- New minimum wage boosts household purchasing power, enables greater spending on imported products

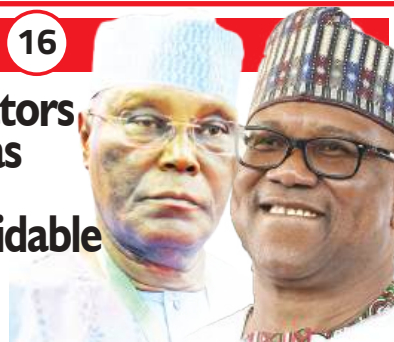
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Also inside

Discordant tunes among leaders as insecurity overwhelms South East ¹²

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Monday, December 16, 2024

Nigerians take Tinubu to task over failed promises as 2024 winds down



As 2024 winds down in the next 16 days, Nigerians have lamented worsening hardship despite the fulfillment of some of the promises made by President Bola Tinubu at the beginning of the closing year.

Tuesday December 17, 2024

FEC approves N47.960trn 2025 budget



The Federal Executive Council has approved the 2025 budget totaling N47.96 trillion. The budget is scheduled for presentation to the National Assembly on Wednesday.

Wednesday December 18, 2024

INSECURITY: Nigerians paid N2.23trn to kidnapers in 12 months – NBS



The National Bureau of Statistics has revealed that Nigerians paid a total of N2.23trillion as ransom over the 12 months between May 2023 and April 2024. This sum was paid by households affected by kidnapping incidents, highlighting the growing threat posed by criminal activities in the country.

Thursday December 19, 2024

2025 N47.9trn budget: Debt servicing to gulp N15.81trn, infrastructure gets N4.06trn



President Bola Tinubu on Wednesday presented the N47.9 trillion 2025 budget proposal before the joint session of the National Assembly with the Federal Government proposing the sum of N4.91 trillion for the defence and security sector in the fiscal year.

Friday December 20, 2024

Ibadan funfair tragedy: Tinubu demands thorough investigation as Police confirm 35 deaths



President Bola Tinubu has expressed profound sadness over the tragic incident at the Children's FunFair in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, which resulted in the loss of innocent lives and left many injured.

Saturday December 21, 2024

Tinubu cancels engagements as 39 killed in Anambra, Abuja food stampedes



No fewer than 39 Nigerians have lost their lives following stampedes during food-sharing events in Okija, Anambra State, and Maitama, Abuja, on Saturday. In the struggle to get ahead and obtain the free food items distributed by organisers, the residents trampled upon one another, leading to the deaths.

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Sunday December 22, 2024

Yuletide: How inflation is transforming Nigerian Christmas traditions



As Christmas approaches, rising inflation threatens to dim the festive cheer for many Nigerians grappling with economic hardships. The cost of celebrating Christmas in Nigeria has soared over the years due to increasing prices and economic uncertainty. Many now have to spend significantly more on basic food items and gifts, while some struggle to maintain traditional celebrations as inflation erodes their purchasing power.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



The Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu (left) and his Deputy, Obafemi Hazmat, flagging off the Lagos Boat Regatta 2024 organized by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture, at Five Cowries Creek, Lagos, on Saturday.

FG borrows N5.84trn from bond market to bridge 2024 budget deficit

FESTUS OKOROMADU
ABUJA

The Federal Government has borrowed an estimated N5.84 trillion from the FGN bond market in 2024 amid a move to bridge its 2024 budget deficit.

However, the figures represent a 0.17 per cent decline when compared to the N5.85 trillion the Federal Government borrowed in 2023 through the Debt Management Office.

The DMO, in its auction results, had raised N3.06 trillion from the FGN Bond market in 2022.

The monthly FGN bond auction revealed that investors' total subscription to FGN bonds was N7.09 trillion in 2024, down from N7.43 trillion in 2023 as investors tend to invest in risk-free instruments, of which bond is an example.

The DMO, in the 12 months of 2024, sought to raise N5.72 trillion as its demand on the risk-free instrument increased to N7.09 trillion.

Investors' keen interest in FGN bonds in 2024 was on the backdrop of double-digit inflation that has played a significant role in domestic and foreign investors' investment decisions.

It was also gathered that the DMO, since the beginning of the year, has continually reopened some FGN Bonds and steadily hiked its interest rate to attract investors amid the double-digit inflation rate and lucrative returns in the stock market.

The FG's 2024 budget includes a significant budget deficit, reflecting the gap between the government's projected revenues and expenditures for the year.

According to the proposed budget for 2024, a total budget size of N27.5 trillion, and a budget deficit of N9.18 trillion, as presented by President Bola Tinubu in November 2023.

The budget deficit is projected at N9.18 trillion in 2024 or 3.88 percent of GDP. This is lower than the N13.78 trillion deficit recorded in 2023 which represents 6.11 percent of GDP.

"The deficit will be financed by new borrowings totaling N7.83 trillion, N298.49 billion from Privatisation Proceeds and N1.05 trillion drawdown on multilateral and bilateral loans secured for specific development projects," Tinubu had stated while presenting the 2024 budget of renewed hope at the joint session of the National Assembly.

The government 2025 budget pointed to more borrowing and the FGN bond market will play a major role.

The Federal Government had declared that the N13 trillion deficit in the N48 trillion 2025 budget proposal would be financed through borrowing.

Pension funds Administrators have also played a critical role in partaking in the FGN bond market.

The pension funds industry portfolio in the FGN Bonds (HTM) increased to N13.57 trillion as of October 2024, a report by the National Pension Commission revealed.

Finance analysts attributed the strong de-

mand for FGN bonds to attractive yields, which offer investors high returns on their investments, stressing that the over-subscription also revealed that investors have confidence in the Federal Government's ability to meet its debt obligations.

The appetite for FGN bonds indicates that PFAs and Nigerian investors prefer investment instruments with less volatility that assures them of their capital returns albeit with low yield on investment.

However, some analysts attributed the under subscription to some issuances to fear of interest rate risk, "as investors are fully well informed that the economy is still very much

challenged and that inflationary pressure remains unabated."

"So, investors expect higher yield for this particular issuance, while the government does not wish to borrow at a higher interest rate," said an investment banker & stockbroker, Tajudeen Olayinka.

In recent years, Nigeria's rising debt profile has been a topic of concern, as Vice President, Highcap Securities Limited, David Adnori, warned that the country's debt levels are unsustainable.

Financing this huge infrastructure gap presents a formidable challenge to the government given Nigeria's low revenue-to-GDP ratio of less than 10 per cent making the capital market route.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise, Muda Yusuf stated that the Federal Government had notified the general public of more borrowings.

He said, "With all the volatility and foreign exchange issues, it makes sense to borrow at the domestic market rather than borrowing from the international market. It is all a reflection of our macro economy environment challenges and weak fiscal policy of the government. All this borrowing also is a reflection of the weak financial position of the government and it will continue like that."

According to the recent data released by the DMO, the Federal Government's domestic debt stock for the first half of the year stood at N66.957 trillion, representing 38.6% growth from N48.314 trillion in H1 '23.

CBN borrowings through NTBs rose to N11.8 trillion in H1 '24 from N4.7 trillion in H1'23 and accounted for 17.64 % of the total FG's borrowing.

FG's borrowing through the monthly FGN Bond auctions, which constituted 78.13 % of total FG borrowing during the period, rose to N52.315 trillion in the H1 '24 from N41.722 trillion in H1'23.

FG's borrowing through Sukuk Bonds, which accounted for 1.6% of total FG domestic borrowing during the period, rose to N1.092 trillion in H1 '24 from N742 billion in H1'23.

FG's domestic borrowing through FGN Savings Bonds accounted for 0.08% of total FG's borrowing during the period, also spiked, rising to N55.196 billion in H1 '24 from N30.704 trillion in H1'23. ●

FaceOff



IT MUST BE STATED CATEGORICALLY AND EMPHATICALLY THAT FOR NOW, LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAIRMEN CAN ONLY BE REMOVED THROUGH THE LEGISLATIVE ARM OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ITSELF AND NOT THE STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

—ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE FEDERATION AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE, LATEEF FAGBEMI, SAN.



A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF THE CONSTITUTION AND THE FEDERAL ATTORNEY GENERAL'S COMMENTS, REVEAL THAT THE DECISIONS BY THE EDO STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, VIS-A-VIS, THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE, SENATOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO, ARE ENTIRELY JUSTIFIED.

—CHIEF PRESS SECRETARY TO EDO STATE GOVERNOR, FRED ITUA.

Nigerians' appetite for foreign products to increase import bill from N34.4trn to N66.89trn in 2025

UDEME BASSEY

The continued depreciation of the naira is set to drive Nigeria's import bill to an unprecedented N66.89 trillion in the 2025 fiscal period, marking a significant rise of N34.4 trillion compared to current levels.

The amount is captured in the 2025-2027 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework prepared by the Ministry of Finance and submitted to the National Assembly by President Bola Tinubu.

The MTEF provides the basis for annual budget planning and consists of a macroeconomic framework that indicates fiscal targets, estimates, revenues and expenditure, including government financial obligations in the medium term.

The document, prepared by the Ministry of Budget and National Planning, also sets out the underlying assumptions for these projections, provides an evaluation and analysis of the previous budget and presents an overview of consolidated debt and potential fiscal risks.

According to projections in the 2025-2027 MTEF, this proposed N34.4 trillion increase in import is largely fueled by higher disposable incomes resulting from recent minimum wage adjustments and cash transfer programmes, which have heightened Nigerians' demand for imported goods.

The implementation of a new minimum wage has boosted household purchasing power, enabling greater spending on imported products.

Similarly, the government-led

● New minimum wage boosts household purchasing power, enables greater spending on imported products

POINT

The amount is captured in the 2025-2027 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework prepared by the Ministry of Finance and submitted to the National Assembly by President Bola Tinubu

cash transfers to support households have further spurred consumer spending, significantly increasing the demand for imports.

Despite concerns over rising imports, the MTEF outlines a positive economic growth trajectory over the next three years.

Real GDP growth is projected as: 2025 4.6 per cent; 2025 4.4 per cent; and 2027 5.5 per cent.

This growth is expected to be driven by domestic oil refining capacity, the expansion of the telecommunications sector, crop

production, and job creation, with the bulk of growth coming from the non-oil sector.

Investments from the Renewed Hope Infrastructure Development Fund are anticipated to further strengthen infrastructure and agriculture, supporting sustainable economic expansion.

Nigeria's nominal consumption is expected to rise sharply over the medium term from the projected N206.83 trillion in 2025, to N233.31 trillion and N263.95 trillion in the 2026 and 2027 fiscal periods.

But while this reflects improving consumer activity, experts have said it also fuels inflationary pressures.

Nigeria's inflation is projected to decline to 15.8 per cent by 2025 but will likely remain in the double digits through 2027,

posing challenges for economic stability.

The depreciation of the naira is a key factor behind the projected surge in import bills. However, the MTEF anticipates a stabilization of this trend by 2026, with imports expected to decline marginally to N65.67 trillion and N65.70 trillion in 2026 and 2027 respectively.

This moderation reflects the waning effects of currency depreciation, alongside expected improvements in domestic production capacities.

By 2026 and 2027, inflationary pressures are projected to ease due to the lagged effects of tighter monetary policies, reduced deficit financing, and the resolution of supply-side constraints.

The document stated that the

government's strategic focus on local production and infrastructure investment is expected to curb reliance on imports while boosting economic resilience.

The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria had in October described the high cost of production as a major obstacle to the competitiveness of made-in-Nigeria goods.

The Director General of MAN, Segun Ajayi-Kadir, stated that Nigerian products were of standard quality but struggled to compete with imported goods due to the harsh operating environment.

Ajayi-Kadir addressed the status of Nigerian products in the international market, noting that export remained a viable option for manufacturers but was hampered by the high

cost of production.

He said, "Export is always a viable opportunity for you to increase your profitability. I mean, if you can produce and export, you will earn dollars, improve the economy and even assist you in importing some of your machines and raw materials that are not locally available."

"But you then ask, is this export for export's sake? Because if it is exported, you must be able to sell it in the international market."

"So it is not just enough for you to put your goods on a ship or aircraft and then take it into another country. Your goods have to go to that country and compete with those from so many other countries and even the ones produced in that country."

According to the MAN, locally manufactured goods prices and quality have to be right to be competitive.

"So, if you are facing a high-cost environment, your export cannot be competitive, even though the exchange rates will favour you as your currency will be cheaper."

He highlighted the difficulties manufacturers faced due to delays in export processes, which sometimes resulted in products nearing their shelf life before they could be shipped.

"In some cases, you have some of our products nearing their shelf life before we proceed to export because of the processes that surround export documentation, inspection, and delays that come with it."

"So, we are not able to get the kind of efficiency that is required for you to competitively export, and that is very important in any environment. You cannot operate in a macroeconomic environment that is unproductive and expects that you will be able to grow your manufacturing and then be able to export," he declared.

Ajayi-Kadir dismissed claims that Nigerian products were inferior to imported ones, attributing the misconception to products manufactured by unregulated operators.

"It is untrue that local products are inferior to imported ones. We have Nigerian standards, and our members adhere strictly to these. Without MANCAP (Mandatory Conformity Assessment Programme), you cannot manufacture or sell your products in the market," the MAN Director General said.

He stressed that regulated Nigerian manufacturers produce goods that meet globally acceptable standards, adding that any notion to the contrary was misguided. ●

L-R: Commissioner for Tourism, Arts & Culture, Mrs. Toke Benson-Awoyinka; Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu; Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun; Secretary to the State Government, 'Bimbola Salu-Hundeyin; Assistant Inspector General of Police, Zone 2 Command, Fayoado Adegoke and Head of Service, Lagos, Olabode Agoro during the groundbreaking of 2,200 Police Housing Units at Ijeh Police Barracks, Ikoji, on Thursday.



Panic grips residents as suspected assailants behead nursing mother, abduct child in Osun

TIMOTHY AGBOR OSOGBO

Residents of Isale Osun area of Osogbo, capital of Osun State and its environs have been thrown into palpable fear following the discovery of a headless body in their neighbourhood.

The Point gathered that the residents woke up to the gory corpse last Friday, a situation that has thrown the entire community into tension.

The victim was said to be a homeless nursing mother who had been abandoned by her husband so many years ago.

Identified as Khajidat, the

slain woman was said to have been killed by suspected ritualists on the road that leads to Osun grove at midnight.

A resident of the area, Gbemi, told The Point that the deceased had been wandering with her baby since she was abandoned by her husband, adding that the neglect she

suffered made her to become destitute.

"We know Khadijat in Isale Osun and she was always with her baby begging for food and money from passersby. I think some ritualists would have taken advantage of her vulnerability and loneliness."

"I saw neighbours gathered

and when I peeped, I saw Khajidat whose head had been cut-off and after we searched around, we discovered that her baby had been taken away, possibly by those who killed her."

"The police were later informed of the presence of the corpse and they came to take it away," he said. ●

TIMOTHY AGBOR

A 45-year-old suspected ritualist, Taiwo Yemitan, has been apprehended by operatives of the Ogun State Police Command after being found in possession of a fresh human head and dismembered body parts of a female victim in the Lafenwa area of Abeokuta.

The command's spokesperson,

Ogun Police arrest man with fresh head, other body parts of his female guest

SP Omolola Odutola, announced the arrest in a statement released on Sunday, revealing that Yemitan was taken into custody at approximately 1:40 am at his residence located behind Atinsola Petrol Station, Sanni, Abeokuta.

The police acted on a tip-off from

local security groups, including the Agbekoya and Vigilante operatives, who led the raid on Yemitan's home, where the shocking discovery was made.

"The suspect admitted to knowing the deceased, identified as Darasimi, claiming he had lured

her to his home with the intention of murder. He confessed to the act and implicated two accomplices—Kehinde Yemitan and one Kazeem, whose surname remains unknown. Their aim was to sell the victim's head and body parts," Odutola reported.

The dismembered remains have been transported to the Ijaiye General Hospital morgue for a post-mortem examination.

Meanwhile, efforts are underway to locate Yemitan's accomplices and identify the victim's relatives. ●

Police reject Amnesty report on #EndBadgovernance protests, demand retraction, apology

BRIGHT JACOB

The Nigeria Police Force has dismissed allegations made by Amnesty International in its report, describing the claims as false, misleading, and damaging to the image of the force.

The report, dated November 28, 2024, accused the police of extrajudicial killings during

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Adejobi revealed that a special investigative panel had been constituted to verify the claims.

the #EndBadgovernance protests, claiming that at least 24 people were killed in six northern states.

Titled "Bloody August: Ni-

geria Government's Violent Crackdown on #EndBad-Governance Protests," the report has been refuted by the police, who assert that their findings contradict Amnesty International's allegations.

Addressing a press briefing on the matter on Sunday, Force spokesperson, Muyiwa Adejobi, revealed that a special investigative panel had been constituted to verify the claims.

He explained that the panel, in collaboration with commissioners of police from the affected states, conducted extensive investigations and compiled a comprehensive report highlighting inaccuracies in Amnesty International's allegations.

"Amnesty International is advised to reflect on its frequent false reporting on Nigeria's law enforcement activities and ensure its reports are accurate and contain a true and fair representation of events affecting national security and public safety. Accurate reporting of facts is essential to the integrity of any international organisation,

and Amnesty International should not be an exception," Adejobi said.

He added that the police would write to demand a retraction of the report as well as a public apology for the alleged inaccuracies.

"The Nigeria Police Force will, in due course, write to Amnesty International to demand the retraction of this report from the public domain along with a public apology. The Nigeria Police Force remains resolute in protecting the rights of all citizens while ensuring the security and stability of the nation. We, therefore, urge the public to be wary of sensational reports designed to incite mistrust and weaken confidence in law enforcement institutions," Adejobi said.

Reeling out the police findings in Borno, Adejobi said the police didn't use grenades as claimed by the organisation.

He said, "In Borno State, it was established that the protesters were violent, engaging in widespread looting, pillaging, and wanton destruction

of public and private property. For example, the Skill Acquisition Centre of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees was looted and vandalised.

"The warehouse of the World Food Programme, located on Baga/Maimalari Barracks Road, Maiduguri, was also looted, with several items belonging to the international organisation destroyed and stolen by some of the protesters.

"Therefore, the claims by Amnesty International that the police threw a hand grenade from a convoy of vehicles into a filling station killing three persons is a blatant falsehood and leaves right-thinking members of society dismayed at this reported falsehood by an international agency that ought to act in accordance with international norms and standards of fair and honest reporting of human rights violations in the country."

In Niger State, Adejobi said the claim that three individuals were shot dead in Suleja was debunked in the police

findings.

Adejobi said the alleged killing of a 21-year-old in Katsina was also found to be unsubstantiated, adding that local sources confirmed that no such incident occurred.

Also in Kaduna State, Adejobi said contrary to Amnesty International's report, no protests occurred in Kaduna on October 1, 2024, and no police killings were recorded.

He said instead, an incident involving the Nigerian Army was identified and openly investigated.

Adejobi said Amnesty International reported the deaths of two women and a man during protests in Jigawa, but the police investigations revealed no such killings, and evidence suggested that the lone fatality was caused by protester violence, not police action.

In Kano State, Adejobi said the report alleged 12 deaths in Kano due to police actions, stating that investigations indicated that these deaths resulted from violent confrontations involving looters and criminals, not police activity. ●

HDAN faults FG's N88bn housing budget, advocates N500bn investment

UDEME BASSEY

The Housing Development Advocacy Network has condemned the Federal Government's allocation of N88.14bn to the Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in the proposed 2025 budget.

The group described the funding as insufficient to address Nigeria's housing deficit, estimated at 28 million units, and an indication that affordable housing for low-income earners is not a priority for the government.

In a statement issued on Sunday in Abuja, HDAN's Executive Director, Festus Adebayo, expressed disappointment over the allocation.

He argued that the budget undermines the administration's Renewed Hope Agenda, which aims to deliver 20,000 housing units annually.

"The allocation is grossly insufficient to tackle the housing deficit. The government needs to prioritize housing as a critical sector. At least N500bn is needed annually to make meaningful progress," Adebayo said.

Adebayo emphasized that housing investments offer significant economic returns.

"Unlike other sectors, budgetary provision for housing is retrievable when houses are sold. The money comes back to the government after creating jobs and boosting economic development. At least 70% of the expenditure can be recovered, even if the houses are subsidized," he stated.

He also noted that the average cost of a single housing unit ranges between N6 million and N10 million, requiring substantial funding to meet presidential targets.

Adebayo highlighted the disparity in funding for the housing ministry compared to others: Ministry of Works, over N926bn; Ministry of Power N531bn; Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation N114bn.

"This disparity underscores a lack of prioritization of housing, which is a critical need for Nige-

rians," he argued.

The HDAN leader criticised the lack of budgetary provisions for key initiatives such as the Family Homes Fund Limited and the Federal Housing Authority.

However, he welcomed the government's establishment of the MOFI Real Estate Investment Fund, which is scheduled to launch in 2025, as a positive step.

"HDAN will be at the forefront to ensure that MOFI's mandate is achieved and that Nigerians benefit from these initiatives," Adebayo said.

Adebayo called on President Bola Tinubu to demonstrate greater commitment to the housing sector, warning that insufficient funding could derail the administration's housing promises.

"The government needs to match its talk on housing with action. The Renewed Hope for Housing will not be realized if the Ministry of Housing continues to be starved of funds," he said.

The budget allocation for housing was reduced from N99bn in the previous year to N88bn, which he termed as a step backward in tackling the housing situation.

The declaration serves as a rallying cry for the government to reconsider its priorities and devote adequate resources to a sector with substantial economic and social implications. ●



L-R: Deputy Commissioner of Police (Administration), Sagir Ismail; Ogun State Commissioner of Police, Lanre Ogunlowo; Governor Dapo Abiodun; Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations), Bolanle Muritala, and the Deputy Commissioner of Police (CID), Bode Ojajuni, during the visit of Ogunlowo as the newly appointed Commissioner of Police to the Governor at his office, Oke-Mosan, Abeokuta, on Thursday.

FG absolves Tinubu's reforms from stampedes over foodstuffs

TIMOTHY AGBOR

The Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, has warned politicians against linking stampedes that occurred during food distributions in Oyo, Anambra and Abuja to President Bola Tinubu's economic reforms.

He however sympathised with the families of those who lost their lives in the tragic incidents which claimed over 70

lives, including about 40 children.

The Labour Party presidential candidate in the 2023 general elections, Peter Obi, had blamed the stampedes on the systemic failures in Nigeria amid widespread hardship in the country.

The minister in a statement signed by his Senior Special Assistant, Rabiu Ibrahim, said the tragedies underscored the importance of ensuring proper crowd management during such charitable activities, espe-

cially in the festive season.

He acknowledged the noble intentions of organisers seeking to bring relief to vulnerable members of society and admonished all individuals and organisations planning similar events to comply with the directive of the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, on liaising with the police formations for effective crowd control and security measures.

He emphasised that collaboration with the police and the

National Emergency Management Agency was crucial to safeguarding lives and ensuring that such efforts to assist those in need do not inadvertently lead to further distress.

Idris appealed to politicians and other stakeholders to refrain from politicising the unfortunate incidents, stressing that those tragic events were in no way connected to President Tinubu's administration's economic reforms.

"It is worth noting that simi-

lar unfortunate occurrences have been recorded in the past, before the current administration, as such, making any attempt to link these tragedies to the President's reforms is unfounded and disingenuous," he said.

Idris said the reforms, while repositioning the Nigerian economy for sustainable growth, were designed to uplift the lives of all Nigerians, particularly the vulnerable without causing distress. ●



Tinubu



Nuhu Ribadu



THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE THAT MAY HAVE REGIONAL SYMPATHY FOR THEM (CRIMINALS) AND THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO JUST HAVE SYMPATHY FOR THEM BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT ANYTHING GOOD FOR THIS COUNTRY.

when our information is not safe, every of our plans will be leaked to the opposition and that is why we cannot succeed."

He added, "These saboteurs we are talking about, they are in the top echelon of the military or paramilitary. There was a president; I don't want to mention names; that was quoted as saying that, "I know there are some Boko Haramists in my government". A president said something like that some time ago. That means these people that are sabotaging, the saboteurs, they might be politicians, they might be military and they might be civilians. Some people are using Boko Haram and banditry to achieve political reasons; some people are using them for business reasons. Where are these miscreants that are not looking well-fed, how can they afford the kind of weapons that they are handling? How are these weapons getting to their hands and getting to the country?"

Ojo, a Certified Golden member of International Security Association, Switzerland, claimed that many government vehicles and cars of some high placed individuals in the country are being used to convey illegal weapons for terrorists and other marauders across the country, urging military and other security agencies to always ensure they subject government vehicles, including convoys, to checks before passing them.

According to him, most of the coffins that are being conveyed are for smuggling weapons, admonishing military checkpoints not to be carried away by emotions upon sighting caskets, as their contents might be arms and not corpses.

"On our highways, these people (criminals) are fooling us. How? Some people will be traveling by road, they will carry a coffin, and they will put posters and others, and immediately when they get to the checkpoint, they will say "go, may his soul rest in peace". Inside those coffins, most of the time, it is arms and ammunition they are crossing like that. Then, there is respect for high profile vehicles in Nigeria, when somebody is coming and he tags the number plate, "Government House", our military checkpoint will just throw salute, whereas, these are the high profile vehicles that are loaded with weapons. All these high profile vehicles are above the law in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

INSECURITY

Top govt officials, military brass, others accused of sabotage

- Tinubu urged to expose, flush out bad eggs in upper security echelon, govt circles
- 'How terrorists, bandits, other criminals cross illegal weapons using govt vehicles'
- Lawyers want Tinubu to increase 2025 budget for security to 20%

TIMOTHY AGBOR AND
BRIGHT JACOB

Security experts have said that there is a need for saboteurs among the military and paramilitary forces in the country to be fished out if the war against insecurity in Nigeria would be won.

They also argued that those sabotaging efforts at confronting security challenges in the country are not only limited to the security agencies, noting that some top government officials are culpable.

Tasking President Bola Tinubu to expose and flush out the bad eggs that have populated top security echelon and government circles, they stated that these highly placed individuals have been frustrating efforts at abating terrorism, banditry and kidnapping in the country.

Nigeria has been confronting escalating security challenges amid increasing killings and abductions of innocent citizens.

From widespread banditry and Boko Haram insurgency to rampant kidnappings and the persistent issue of oil theft in the Niger Delta, the situation grows increasingly dire. Nigerians are expressing their exasperation with the seemingly endless stream of threats issued by the

Federal Government and security agencies in response to these crises.

Despite the frequent pronouncements from security chiefs vowing to crush these criminal elements, Nigerians see little tangible progress.

Just recently, the National Bureau of Statistics said that Nigerians paid N2.23 trillion as ransom to kidnapers in twelve months.

The NBS said the payments were made between May 2023 and April 2024.

According to the NBS's latest Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey report published last Tuesday, 65 percent of households affected by kidnapping paid ransoms for the release of their loved ones from the abductors' den.

"The average amount paid as ransom was N2,670,693, with an estimated total ransom of N2,231,772,563,507 paid within the reference period," the NBS report read.

Reacting to the dire situation in an exclusive interview with The Point, a security expert of international repute, Jackson Lekan Ojo, challenged the Nigerian government to weed out and expose those who amass wealth and take over political positions through investments in insecurity in the country.

Ojo also revealed how terrorists, bandits and other criminals cross illegal weapons using government vehicles and others owned by highly placed individuals in the country without being checked at military checkpoints.

The executive protection specialist, who is a Fellow of International Institute of Professional Security, asked governments to monitor the phone calls of security personnel and others in the security sector in order to fish out those working against the interest of the nation.

Insisting that there are saboteurs among the rank and file of military and paramilitary forces, he said, "There is a very simple thing that nobody is taking seriously and that thing is? Both the Chief of Defence Staff, the National Security Adviser, Ministers of Defence, senior and junior, which are also administrative defence men, we are not taking seriously and taking cognizance of are saboteurs in the system. We are not taking cognizance that there are some people who have religious sympathy for all these people (terrorists and other criminals). There are some people that may have regional sympathy for them (criminals) and there are some people who just have sympathy for them

because they don't want anything good for this country.

"So, anyone that is going to make Nigeria uncomfortable, they are very happy to work with such persons. So, we are not taking cognizance of saboteurs. If we are taking cognizance of saboteurs, I think there is nothing wrong if we monitor the phones of all the military and paramilitary men. Monitor their numbers and know who they are speaking with and know when they are talking. Why is it that it is when our troops are moving from one place to the other that some people will just go and block roads?

"For example, something happened in Yobe State the other time when Boko Haramists people were fighting, and when the troops were going there to combat them, they now discovered that the amoral of the Nigerian Army was part of them fighting for them, and they got him arrested and they said when they brought him back to camp, he escaped; till tomorrow, he is not found.

"So, Nigerians should take cognizance of the internal and external saboteurs in the military, among the intelligence agencies. We are not taking cognizance of this. If we don't take cognizance of this, definitely, our information is not safe and

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Nigeria, but they are not above the law in other parts of the world. Not until we correct all these things, we may not be out of this insecurity soon. When it comes to the issue of security, nobody is above the law. But in Nigeria here, all these tinted glasses with State Government House insignia, military will salute them, not knowing they are using all those things to pack arms and ammunition," the expert alleged.

Meanwhile, the Office of the National Security Adviser is the nation's top security and intelligence position.

This is the seat where the buck stops, as regards to all problems of terrorism and insecurity in the nation.

The position is a statutory member of the National Security Council and Federal Executive Council and chairs meetings of the Nigerian intelligence agencies.

Historically, appointment to the office has been held by senior police officers, and, the top brass of military officers up to, and, including three- and four-star generals.

In Nigeria's security architecture, the military is also seen as being superior to other security agencies, so there are questions about whether the service chiefs will report to the NSA, Nuhu Ribadu, a former policeman who retired with a lesser rank than theirs.

There are mounting concerns about whether a former policeman-turned-politician can succeed where multiple generals have failed – in tackling insecurity.

However, Ojo said Ribadu only plays an advisory role to President Tinubu on security but lacks power of command and control.

Ojo clarified that the NSA can only give advice to the President and not give orders to the military, stating that there could not have been any deliberate attempt to frustrate the NSA in discharging his responsibilities.

"The position of the National Security Adviser is not the position of command and control and the NSA is not in charge of command and control. In the Nigeria Police, the power of command and control is in the hand of the Inspector General of Police, in the Nigerian Army, the power of command and control is in the hand of Chief of Army Staff, the same thing in Air Force, Nigerian Navy, Department of State Services, National Intelligence Agency and others.

"Then, all the military will now report to the Chief of Defence Staff, which will collate all their reports and send it to the office of the National Security Adviser. Then, the office of the National Security Adviser will be the one that will advise Mr President who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces on what to do.

"So, there is no way the Army, the Navy, Air Force, the DSS, NIA, and Civil Defence will sabotage the efforts of the NSA. NSA is just a security advisory office to the President. He is not in the field and he has no men on the field. So, the principle

of command and control is in the hands of the Chief of Army Staff, Naval Staff, Air Staff, and the Inspector General of Police. And when you talk of intelligence gathering, that is why we have the DSS, the office in the Army, Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), all these people are supposed to directly be in charge of operations and at the end of the day, they will report to the Chief of Defence Staff, the Chief of Defence Staff will collate all the reports and send them to the office of the National Security Adviser whereas the office of the NSA will study the reports holistically and he will advise Mr President on what to do. So, there is nothing like sabotage.

"He is the National Security Adviser to the President, it is a security advisory role, he is not in charge of command and control. The NSA cannot command the Chief of Army Staff, he cannot command the Chief of Defence Staff, he collects their reports and he will study them holistically and advise Mr President. The office of NSA is an advisory role," he explained.

However, a legal practitioner, Tunbosun Oladipupo, has suggested more funding of security, noting that the N4.5 trillion budget for security in Tinubu's 2025 proposed budget is insufficient.

Oladipupo, in an exclusive interview with The Point, advised President Tinubu to increase budgetary allocation for providing security to 20 per cent of the total budget.

He also favoured the creation of state police as one of the means of tackling banditry, terrorism and other criminal tendencies in the country.

"What the government should do is to quickly pass the law so that we can have state police. Every security is local and if anybody is posted to Osogbo and he does not know the terrain, how will he perform his security work well? But, if there are locally recruited policemen, they will know where criminals live and they know how to flush them out and get them arrested. The government

should go for state police and there should be synergy between the federal police, state police, Amotekun and whatever security agencies that are working to protect us. Then, let the government employ more security personnel.

"There are ungoverned places in our country. If you are traveling from Osogbo to Ibadan, when you get to Ikire expressway, anything can happen on that road because there are few places that you see policemen. We need policemen to be everywhere or the government should employ what we call artificial intelligence to monitor everywhere, every part of the country. If these happen, then we can say we are on our way to better security.

"Another important thing is funding. If the government is actually committed to tackling insecurity, it requires a lot of money. If the government will employ more security personnel, install CCTV cameras to strategic places, it requires a lot of funds.

"In the budget for 2025, about N4.5 trillion was budgeted for security. That is too small for a population that is going to 250 million. That is very small. So, the government should look for a way and even involve private citizens to contribute their quota so that we can have good and better security in our country. Security should take about ten to twenty percent of our money because without security, there is nothing we can do. You are saying people should come and invest in a country where they are killing people? Look at what is happening in some parts of the country now because of rice. More than 35 people were murdered in Ibadan, ten in Abuja, 35 in Anambra because of rice. Government must do something about poverty because an idle mind is the devil's workshop.

"How you fight poverty is that when you employ more people, you pay them. In that manner, you will be fighting poverty and at the same time, fighting insecurity and with

this, the economy will be strengthened," the lawyer stated.

A senior lawyer, Clement Iloh, said about the increasing kidnappings, "I wonder why we are surprised that the rate of kidnappings and other vices have increased astronomically and Nigerians are looking for who to blame.

"The increase was expected. And the tragedy of the situation is that this is just the beginning. If the situation is not dealt with now, next year will be bloodier – but God forbid!

"We cannot continue dancing in circles in this country or keep gathering for tales by moonlight each time we have national emergencies like this. We have played too long in this country and we must wake up.

"I also saw the statistics released by the NBS. I have stopped believing the bureau on the figures they release. They are 90 percent of the time not correct.

"So, even if I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, the holy truth is that kidnapping for ransom is underreported in Nigeria.

"The true figures are far more



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than what we are reading on the website of the NBS. Who are they kidding?

"How about the instances where families involved don't report to the police? I can bet my salary that cases not reported to the police are more than cases that were reported. But we pretend like all is well in the country and move on."

Iloh also said that there are no deliberate attempts to frustrate Ribadu by preventing him from discharging his responsibilities.

In his opinion, the economic situation is the "force" fighting Ribadu's success.

"I know that many Nigerians are thinking that there are deliberate attempts to frustrate Ribadu in his capacity as the National Security Adviser. But I beg to disagree.

"The real force working against him is the poor economic situation of the country. It is working against his success and I will explain.

"But before I do so, I want to say that whenever anyone is doing something well, commendations and praise should be in order.

"The Federal Government is doing well in the area of counter-insurgency and they should be commended for that.

"There is no longer any safe place for most of the terrorists in the country. I am talking about terrorists who used to smoke in the open and move in convoys of motorbikes as they ransack communities.

"The military is flushing them out of their enclaves and many of these terrorists have now taken to kidnapping.

"It is the only way they can make ends meet. Kidnapping for ransom is now their meal ticket.

"So, whether there are attempts to frustrate Ribadu, I don't think so. The poor economy is actually at the root cause of the huge ransoms paid and if it (the economy) doesn't improve next year, kidnap kingpins will have more foot soldiers at their disposal.

"We must not forget that their nefarious activities have become an industry in the country and instead of us, or Ribadu himself, wondering who is the enemy of progress, we should sit up and face this fight squarely.

"And one more thing, the rank of the individual occupying the office of the NSA does not matter. It doesn't matter, too, whether he or she is a police officer or in the military.

"I believe that even a well-educated police sergeant can do a good job there. And if those who should be his subordinates try to rubbish that individual, let's show them the exit door immediately," Iloh said.

However, a public affairs analyst, Austine Uche-Ejeke, said Ribadu should leave politics alone and stop being the poster boy of President Tinubu.

"Ribadu should stop doing the work of the Minister of Information, publicity secretary of the ruling All People Congress or a presidential spokesman. He should face the onerous task of providing adequate security for the entire country," he said. ●



Kayode Egbetokun



General Christopher Musa

Nigerians must stand for what is right to overcome our challenges – Sinatu Ojikutu

Alhaja Sinatu Aderoju Ojikutu, a Nigerian politician, industrialist, and administrator, is best known as the first elected female deputy governor in Nigeria. She was born on October 23, 1945, in Isale Eko, Lagos Island, Lagos State. She received her education at Ereko Methodist School, Lagos, St. John's School, Iyin-Ekiti, Our Lady of Apostles Girls Secondary School, Ijebu Ode, Ilesa Grammar School, Ilesha, the University of Lagos, and Long Island University in New York, USA. She began her career as a Senior Library Clerk at the Lagos City Council Library and later served as a French Interpreter at the Nigerian High Commission in Britain in 1969. She also worked as an Accountant and Acting Manager at the National Bank of Nigeria, Lagos. Alhaja Ojikutu was the first woman appointed as an Executive Director at the Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry, and subsequently served as Secretary to the Lagos State Transport Corporation. She was chosen by Sir Michael Otedola as his running mate under the National Republican Convention banner. In 1992, Alhaja Ojikutu became the deputy governor of Lagos State alongside Governor Michael Otedola. Their tenure was cut short by a military takeover in 1993, which removed them from office. In this interview, she expresses dismay over the spate of corruption in the country, urging Nigerians to help in fighting the menace. Excerpts:

There have been complaints about the incessant national grid collapse in Nigeria. What would you say about this?

We shouldn't call it the national grid; we should call it national greed. It all boils down to what is fundamentally wrong with the entire country and its system. People are not satisfied with their situations, and they see others getting away with terrible acts. Everyone is trying to exploit the country in any way they can.

Many of our national assets require continuous maintenance, but they are not properly maintained. In most cases, the very items needed for maintenance are stolen. That is the crux of the problem. The whole nation needs a complete overhaul in its thinking, feelings, and attitudes toward collective responsibility. It is deeply sad.

In the past, people took pride in their workplaces. They could confidently say, I work here, and I am proud of my expertise. Unfortunately, that sense of pride has disappeared. Now, we see engineers who are not truly qualified to be engineers and doctors who are not competent. Everything is chaotic, and it is heartbreaking.

We no longer have people who take pride in their expertise. How can someone work somewhere where there is always a fault, yet nothing improves? Maybe the right materials for maintenance are not purchased, the equipment is not properly serviced, or necessary changes are ignored. People are no longer ashamed of mediocrity. There is no more pride in performance.

Electricity, the lifeblood of any nation, is an essential resource. However, the way energy issues are being handled shows that the nation is very sick.

As a politician, any lesson for Nigerian politicians from the last elections in the United States?

I am not a politician in the typical sense of the word. I am someone who found myself in politics and tried to make the best of it. You could call me a technocrat in politics. However, observing what happened in the United States, it is interesting to see how, in some instances, they almost mimicked certain Nigerian tactics. When something is rotten, it tends to spread.

The determination of the people stood out. Whether for good or bad, they wanted change, and they pursued it. It's not a perfect system, but at least their votes counted. Their institutions and systems upheld their roles. The electoral bodies functioned as they should, with no subjugation or manipulation.

One key factor in their success is that



Ojikutu

many citizens are armed. If someone attempts anything questionable, they are aware the other party might defend themselves. In contrast, here in Nigeria, armed security is often used to intimidate and suppress the people. Over there, even the security forces know that stepping out of line could lead to resistance from armed citizens. This dynamic creates a somewhat organized environment.

The institutions that monitored their elections performed their duties effectively. Their voting centres were well-organised, and the process was transparent. This kind of order and accountability is something we can learn from.

What's your reaction to the treason charge slammed on

#EndBadGovernance protesters?

Bad governance is bad governance, and people want it to end. However, the way certain organisations approach it reveals insincerity from some forces involved. If there were sincerity, as I mentioned earlier, the main issue would not be that people are happy with the state of things—it is the fear of being killed when they protest. Many are reluctant to march for change because some among the protesters are already compromised. This lack of trust hinders any meaningful citizen-driven movement for positive change.

That said, people are being pushed to the wall, and you never know what might happen. The general mismanagement of society and the economy is glaring. It is not a case of people faking dissatisfaction. No-

“**GLARING MALPRACTICES REMAIN UNCHECKED, AND MANY ARE SIMPLY WAITING FOR THEIR TURN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CYCLE OF CORRUPTION. UNTIL WE COLLECTIVELY DECIDE TO BREAK THIS PATTERN AND REFUSE TO PERPETUATE IT, NIGERIA WILL NOT STRAIGHTEN OUT**”

body is pretending about the widespread hunger, the exorbitant cost of goods, or the inaccessibility of basic commodities. These struggles are real and undeniable.

The resilience of Nigerians is remarkable, though puzzling. Where we find the elasticity to endure and adapt is astonishing. People often shake off their grievances, settle into the situation, and move on. Meanwhile, glaring malpractices remain unchecked, and many are simply waiting for their turn to participate in the cycle of corruption. Until we collectively decide to break this pattern and refuse to perpetuate it, Nigeria will not straighten out.

This is why Nigerians abroad are asking people on holidays why they want to 'go back to that country.' They call it that country. Do you think there is any hope for Nigeria

with the way things are going?

This is a country with immense potential. I will never give up on Nigeria, not now or at any time. It is a blessed nation, rich in everything needed to make life comfortable. Even those who have left the country would return if given the chance. Do you know how cold it is where they are now? Many of them, while they were here in Nigeria, did nothing to improve the situation—they were just focused on leaving.

If each of us stands firm in our space and commits to doing things the right way, don't you know that small drops of water make an ocean? If everyone leaves, the very people we are running to will eventually want to return and take over what we left behind. That, I believe, is the ultimate goal—to displace the original owners of this land. Africa, and Nigeria in particular, is the envy of many nations, but we fail to realize it.

I refuse to give up on Nigeria. At my age, where else would I go? I am committed to standing firm. Whenever I encounter something wrong, I correct it. People now see me as an "every-second lecturer" or a constant corrector, but that is fine by me. In your own space, if you choose to do the right thing, it will gradually spread and inspire change. Don't follow the crowd just because "that's how it's done." Wherever I am, I ensure things are done properly, even if it means being called names or insulted.

Some people avoid standing for what is right because they fear being criticized. I don't mind being abused or labeled; I stand for what I believe in, which is ensuring things are done correctly. If every Nigerian, within their sphere of influence, stands for what is right, we will overcome our challenges. Each operator in their field must do the right thing, and this is where national reorientation comes into play.

Nobody is teaching people to do what is right anymore. The prevailing mindset is, "Once I get what I need, I'll leave." But where are you leaving to? Eventually, those places will reject you. I believe in this nation. I believe it will survive and thrive. All it takes is the determination of a few who mean well for Nigeria to stand their ground. Sooner or later, things will change.

What's the source of your boldness? You speak your mind so confidently, without hesitation. Is it something that comes from the way you were raised?

It's God-given. I cannot attribute it to anything else; I was simply born with it. During my school days, I championed the cause of anyone who was being marginal-



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Unshakable worth: Recognizing your true value

Your value is not determined by someone else's inability to see it. Too often, we allow the opinions, judgments, or even the indifference of others to dictate how we feel about ourselves. This mindset can lead to unnecessary self-doubt and diminished confidence. But the truth is your worth is not dependent on external validation. It is an intrinsic quality that exists within you—unchanging and ever-present, regardless of who acknowledges it.

There will always be people who fail to see the value you bring to the table. Perhaps they are too focused on their own lives, blinded by preconceived notions, or simply unable to recognize something extraordinary when they encounter it.

However, their inability to see your worth does not diminish it. A diamond remains a diamond, whether it is admired by a crowd or hidden in the depths of the earth. Similarly, your value is unshakable and independent of others' recognition.

To truly understand and embrace your worth, you must first separate it from the validation of others. This requires introspection and a deliberate effort to redefine how you view yourself.

Your value lies not in how others perceive you but in who



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you are at your core. It is shaped by your unique experiences, skills, and the contributions you make to the world. The key is to focus on what you know to be true about yourself, rather than what others think of you.

Living with this awareness can be liberating. When you recognize your worth, you stop seeking approval from those who may never give it. You no longer feel the need to prove yourself to people who fail to appreciate your efforts. Instead, you channel your energy into living authentically and pursuing your passions. You become more aligned with your purpose, which in turn strengthens your confidence and sense of self.

To make yourself matter, start by affirming your worth daily. This can be as simple as reminding yourself of your strengths and achievements. Celebrate the qualities that make you unique, and don't shy away from acknowledging your successes, no matter how small they may seem. Self-affirmation is a powerful tool for building

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confidence and reinforcing your belief in your abilities.

Another crucial step is to embrace a growth mindset. Understand that your worth is not static; it can grow and expand as

you continue to learn, evolve, and overcome challenges.

Every experience, whether positive or negative, contributes to your growth and shapes your character. By viewing obstacles as opportunities for growth, you transform setbacks into stepping stones toward becoming the best version of yourself.

Equally important is the need to surround yourself with people who uplift and support you. The company you keep plays a significant role in how you perceive yourself.

Seek out relationships that nurture your self-esteem and encourage your growth. True friends and mentors will recognize your value, even when you momentarily forget it. They will remind you of your worth and inspire you to keep striving for greatness.

However, making yourself matter is not just about self-perception—it's also about action. You matter because of what you bring to the world. Focus on your passions and use them to make a difference, no matter how small. Whether it's through your work, relationships, or personal pursuits, strive to leave a positive impact. When you contribute meaningfully to the lives of others, your sense of purpose deepens, and your self-worth becomes even more apparent.

It's important to acknowledge that this journey is not always easy. There will be mo-

ments of doubt and insecurity, especially when faced with criticism or rejection.

During these times, it's essential to remind yourself that external opinions do not define you. You are not your mistakes, nor are you the labels others may try to impose on you. Your worth is constant and cannot be diminished by temporary setbacks.

One way to reinforce this belief is by practicing gratitude. Reflect on the blessings in your life and the progress you've made so far. Gratitude shifts your focus away from what you lack and toward what you already have. It helps you appreciate your journey and recognize the value you bring to your own life and the lives of others.

Self-care also plays a vital role in recognizing your worth. When you prioritize your well-being, you send a powerful message to yourself: "I am important." Whether it's through physical health, mental clarity, or emotional balance, taking care of yourself reinforces your value and ensures that you have the energy and resilience to pursue your goals.

As you navigate this journey, remember that everyone's path is unique. Comparing yourself to others can be a trap that undermines your confidence. Instead of measuring your worth against someone else's achievements, focus on your progress. Celebrate how far you've come and the person you're becom-

ing. Your journey is yours alone, and it is just as valuable as anyone else's.

The world needs what only you can offer. Your unique perspective, talents, and experiences are invaluable, even if they are not immediately recognized by everyone you encounter. By staying true to yourself and embracing your authenticity, you create a ripple effect that inspires and uplifts others. Your value extends far beyond what is visible—it touches lives in ways you may never fully realize.

Ultimately, making yourself matter starts with believing that you already do. Your worth is not something you need to earn or prove; it is something you possess simply by being you. Embrace this truth, and let it guide your actions and decisions. Live with purpose, surround yourself with positivity, and never let anyone's inability to see your light dim your brilliance.

In conclusion, your value is unshakable. It is not defined by others' perceptions or limited by their inability to recognize it. When you affirm your worth, embrace growth, and live authentically, you unlock your full potential. Remember, you matter—not because of what others think but because of who you are. Stand tall, shine brightly, and never forget that your worth is infinite and undeniable. ●

Austine Uche-Ejeke

Of all the problems bedeviling the country and Nigerians today, the issue of cash scarcity and the inability of Nigerians to access their money in the banks should not come up at all.

This is because Nigerians have not had it so bad in decades in terms of the current hardship, suffering and neglect they are passing through today.

The least they can ask is the right to access the money they saved in the bank or money the banks used as a means of payment for products and services they rendered.

But what do we have today, a situation where Nigerians will queue for hours either at the bank's counter or at the ATM, only to be paid a paltry N5, 000, N10, 000 or N20, 000, depending on the bank or how lucky they are. This is not supposed to be so.

Perpetual praise singers and supporters of evil will be quick to tell you that the problem did not start with this regime. In fact, they will be quick to tell you that President Bola Tinubu sacked the former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor, Godwin Emefiele, because of this problem.

The question is how long we should continue in this blame game and when it will stop. Thank God Emefiele is no longer the CBN

Enough of suffering over cash scarcity

governor today. The current regime campaigned and promised to right the wrongs of the previous administration. Then, why does this problem persist to this moment?

It is our position to lay the blame at the doorsteps of the CBN governor under Yemi Cardoso.

Our position is predicated on the fact that the CBN remains the lender of last resort, regulator, and enforcer of all monetary transactions and activities in the country.

If that is the case, the CBN as an enforcement monetary institution should know how much money it dishes out to the banks and monitor if this money is evenly distributed to ensure that a greater number of Nigerians have access to their money when they want it.

To us, it is merely tomfoolery and playing to the gallery when CBN asks Nigerians to report banks that don't meet their demands. Funny enough the CBN will put some phony phone numbers that are hard to connect for Nigerians to make complaints.

The most annoying aspect of all these is that the same cash that Nigerians cannot get across the counter or at the ATMs are often seen with individuals and you keep on wondering how individuals and organisations manage to get this cash.

Cases of burst warehouses and apartments where stacks of bundles of naira were discovered keep on insulting the psyche and sensibilities of Nigerians who often question if this is not the same cash they are not able to withdraw at the banks and ATMs.

Also, the same scarce cash is what we find in the hands of PoS operators and those described as cash merchants.

The implication of this is that Nigerians now use money to buy the money they are supposed to cash out at the bank's counter or the ATMs. What a tragedy and suffering of double jeopardy by depositors?

The problem is further accentuated by the shocking revelation that supermarkets, petrol filling stations and others now engage in the lucrative business of cash trading, where the cash they collect from buyers is now sold to PoS operators and cash merchants for them to resell to hapless Nigerians.

An ageing woman in Umuahia, Abia State cried out recently, lamenting how they now buy their own money from PoS operators. This is the money they are supposed to collect from the bank. She recounted how she used N400 to collect N15, 000. The actual charge is supposed to be N100.

All these point to the rot in the

THE MOST ANNOYING ASPECT OF ALL THESE IS THAT THE SAME CASH THAT NIGERIANS CANNOT GET ACROSS THE COUNTER OR AT THE ATMS ARE OFTEN SEEN WITH INDIVIDUALS AND YOU KEEP ON WONDERING HOW INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS MANAGE TO GET THIS CASH

system whereby banks rip off depositors not only through extraneous and out-of-this-world charges but also sell off their hard-earned cash to PoS operators, who in turn will resell the money to them at very outrageous rates.

No wonder banks keep on declaring sickening billions of naira as profit every year even when the economy is not smiling.

So, we call on the Federal Government to put fire on the CBN and particularly its governor, Yemi Cardoso, to sit up and do their work. It should police and monitor these banks properly. It can go further to make publications of how much cash each bank gives out daily and question them when there are reports of shortage or cash scarcity by depositors.

That also brings us to the role of security agencies in the country. The National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, should leave politics alone and stop being the poster boy of President Tinubu.

Ribadu should stop doing the work of the Minister of Information, publicity secretary of the ruling All People Congress or a presidential spokesman. He should face the onerous task of providing adequate security for the entire country.

A country where its citizens cry out daily of inability to access their money in the banks is a huge security risk and problem that if not urgently and adequately tackled could lead to an uprising and breakdown of law and order.

The Economic Financial Crime

Commission, Department of State Security, police and other security agencies should live up to their billing and police these banks.

The EFCC should not just be seen pursuing "Yahoo boys" and other "minor criminals" but see this as a major economic and financial crime against the citizens of this great country. It should put its eyes on the ground to see how this money develops wings and finds solace in the confines of individuals and organisations.

This is a festive season and end-of-year activities and as such Nigerians need their money to carry out a lot of transactions. They should not be denied access to their money or forced to buy the same exorbitantly from PoS operators and cash merchants. They should have it when they need it.

Nigerians have suffered enough untold hardship concerning this and the government better wakes up to its responsibility before things get out of hand. ●

•Uche-Ejeke, a public affairs analyst, writes via eaustineuche@yahoo.com

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The scandalous kidnapping statistics in Nigeria

Many Nigerians were stunned on Tuesday when the latest Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey report by the National Bureau of Statistics became public.

The NBS told the world that Nigerian households paid a total of N2.23trn as ransom over the last 12 months between May 2023 and April 2024, and that an estimated number of 51.89 million crime incidents were recorded within the stated period.

The report left many citizens tongue-tied.

According to the NBS, 65 percent of households affected by kidnapping incidents resorted to paying ransoms to secure the release of victims. On average, each household paid N2.67 million.

Nationally, an estimated 51,887,032 crime incidences were experienced by households.

The North West with about 14,402,254 reported the highest incidences of crime at household level, followed by North Central (8,771,400), while South East (6,176,031) reported the least.

The report also shows that the crime incidence in the rural area, which stood at 26,526,069, was higher than that of the urban area at 25,360,963 incidents reported.

The total ransom paid over the 12-month period is also equivalent to 8.2 percent of Nigeria's total federal budget for 2024, which stands at N28.8 trillion.

The insecurity in Nigeria is getting more serious. Kidnapping has become a huge and lucrative business as many families are paying hefty ransoms to free their kidnapped relatives.

It is simply troubling that a nation that is not at war would be having such a staggering number of abductions in one year.

If the NBS report is anything to go by, it would be safe to say that it made nonsense of the claim by some state governors and even the military that thousands of bandits and other insurgents have given up criminality.

While the efforts of the NBS should be commended for bringing to the fore the harm that insecurity is doing to Nigeria, it is also expedient to remind the security agencies that there must be a new tactic to fight the battle.

With the total N4.76 trillion budget for security and defence for next year, efforts must be made to put the huge figure into proper use.

It has been established that the extreme hunger being experienced in Nigeria is driving many citizens into all manner of criminality. People are said to be lured into dangerous groups for a mere portion of portage.

The Federal Government must ensure that it reduces the high level of hunger in the land through policies that have a human face. A country where 51.89 million crime incidents, as captured by the NBS, occurred in just one year is simply scandalous.

It would be unfortunate if, at the end of 2025, the NBS comes up again with a damning figure of paid ransom and kidnapped citizens.

The NBS report shows the effect of the kidnapping crisis on the nation's economy.

This is one of the reasons why poverty is deepening in the country as many families are struggling to raise money to rescue their loved ones in the hands of criminals. So, they do not really have much to take care

of themselves and pay school fees and take care of the health of their loved ones.

It is also contributing to the escalation of criminal activities because people know that when they do this, they get money and it appears that they are succeeding in this criminality.

It must be stated that the security forces have failed to safeguard Nigerians from such criminals, forcing citizens to pay heavy ransoms to secure the release of their loved ones.

It is a shame for Nigerian security to have failed in its main occupation, which is to protect lives and property of the citizens.

Ransom payments are having destructive impacts on Nigeria's economy, because the majority of these funds circulate within the shadow economy, meaning that they are outside the formal financial systems and do not contribute to national development through taxation or other legal channels.

This unregulated flow of funds is undermining economic stability and destroying the economy.

It also leads to increased criminality because most of them are youths. The more they see the perpetrators enjoying the proceeds of their crime, the more they will also be tempted to go into it.

Ransom payments also enable the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as criminals use the proceeds to acquire more sophisticated tools to sustain and escalate their activities. This, in turn, worsens insecurity across the country.

It is worrisome that Nigeria's cashless policy, which could have helped trace ransom payments, is not fully implemented or monitored.

The cashless policy that has been

declared is not fully implemented; it is not fully complied with, and so that makes it very difficult to monitor transactions.

Addressing the multifaceted drivers of kidnapping requires a comprehensive approach that tackles root causes while strengthening law enforcement.

By addressing these underlying factors, policymakers can work towards creating safer and more secure communities and mitigate the pervasive threat of kidnapping in the country.

The economic impact of kidnapping is multifaceted and far-reaching. The tourism and hospitality industry experiences a significant downturn, with fewer tourist visits and hotel bookings observed, alongside adverse effects on restaurants, entertainment venues, and other hospitality businesses.

There is a notable decline in business investment and expansion across the country as businesses express reluctance to invest or expand operations due to security concerns, ultimately affecting job creation and hindering economic growth.

Daily economic activities are disrupted as fear of kidnapping prompts changes in consumer behaviour, with individuals avoiding certain areas or activities perceived as high-risk, further exacerbating the economic challenges faced in the country.

The Federal Government must prioritize public safety and security, invest in effective law enforcement strategies, intelligence gathering, and crisis response capabilities and mitigate the adverse effects of kidnapping and promote sustainable economic growth and development. ●

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST ENSURE THAT IT REDUCES THE HIGH LEVEL OF HUNGER IN THE LAND THROUGH POLICIES THAT HAVE A HUMAN FACE. A COUNTRY WHERE 51.89 MILLION CRIME INCIDENTS, AS CAPTURED BY THE NBS, OCCURRED IN JUST ONE YEAR IS SIMPLY SCANDALOUS.

City Pulse

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● CRIME ● COURTS MARRIAGE PALAVER

Discordant tunes among leaders as insecurity overwhelms South East

TIMOTHY AGBOR
OSOGBO

Prominent political and socio-cultural leaders in the South East have been thrown into confusion over worsening insecurity in the region.

They are already having doubts over the expected role that the release of the detained leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, Nnamdi Kanu would play in reducing killing, kidnapping and other forms of criminalities in the region.

Before now, South East governors' forum, leaders of thought, traditional rulers and other key players in the administration of Igboland had called on President Bola Tinubu to release Kanu, expressing optimism that insecurity would be a thing of the past once Kanu regains freedom.

Kanu had also vowed that he will end the insecurity in the South East in two minutes, if released from detention.

He said nobody in the South East can counter his orders concerning the security situation in the region. The infuriated Biafra agitator, while addressing journalists within the courtroom of the Abuja Federal High Court in March, this year, lamented the killing spree in the region.



Sadly, killings and all manner of criminalities have not abated in the South East.

The Governor of Anambra State, Chukwuma Soludo, who has been in the forefront of demand for Kanu's release, said criminals in the region are natives of Igboland and that they have grown hardened.

Soludo, while reacting to the gruesome murder of some individuals in Anambra State recently, doubted if the release of Kanu would end the pervasive insecurity in the South East.

Soludo argued that criminals had hijacked the Biafran struggle and were now exploiting the Biafran struggle and Kanu's name to perpetrate organised crime and fuel insecurity in the South East region.

Soludo noted that under the guise of

agitation, these individuals had turned to "lucrative criminality," engaging in armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, and idolatry.

He insisted that their activities have nothing to do with the genuine liberation struggle, stating that such crimes are purely driven by greed and lawlessness.

Speaking at a media briefing over the carnage in the South East, Soludo revealed that over 99 per cent of criminals arrested in Anambra in the past two years were Igbo, with more than 70 per cent being non-indigenes of the state.

"The so-called agitators have transformed into organised criminal gangs," Soludo said, adding, "They hide in forests, kidnapping innocent citizens for ransom, and they justify their atrocities under the pretext of Biafra. Let us be clear—this has nothing to do with any liberation movement. Criminality has taken on a life of its own. These people have tasted blood, and now, money is their motivation."

Maintaining that the release of Kanu would not end the crisis, the governor said the criminals appear to have severed ties with the original agitation.

Soludo said: "Kanu and IPOB have repeatedly dissociated themselves from these criminals."

"Even if Nnamdi Kanu is released today, I am not sure they would listen to him because what they now pursue is wealth, not liberation. They have become enemies of the people they claim to protect. Who are they fighting for when they kidnap and kill their own people?"

Soludo further decried the complicity of some communities in shielding these criminals, adding that insecurity in the region was sustained because some locals viewed security agencies as adversaries and the criminals as liberators.

"Our people know these criminals. They are our brothers, cousins, and neighbors," he said, pointing out that "It's unfortunate that in some communities, people contribute food to sustain these criminals hiding in the forests. How do you fight insecurity when people see criminals as heroes and the police as the enemy?"

The governor announced the plan to launch 'Operation Udo Ga Chi' (Operation Peace Shall Reign), a state-wide security initiative scheduled to commence after January 25.

Also expressing similar views with Governor Soludo, another prominent leader of the South East, Chief Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu Junior, eldest son of the late Biafra leader, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, said even though Kanu's release may not stop killings in the region, it would assuage the rising tension.

He called on the Federal Government to release the detained IPOB leader for insecurity to reduce crime in the South East.

Emeka Ojukwu Jnr, while speaking in Awka, lamented that Kanu has been held and prosecuted by the state on charges of terrorism, and crime against the state, and insisted that if he is released the insecurity in the Southeast especially Anambra State would reduce drastically.

He said, "There has been a daily violent

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

CSOs task governors, lawmakers on budgetary provision to tackle gender-based violence

TIMOTHY AGBOR
OSOGBO

Civil society and not-for-profit organisations have charged state governors and members of the State Houses of Assembly to prioritise efforts at ending Sexual and Gender Based Violence through effective and sufficient budgetary allocation to the course.

They urged governments at the sub-national level to make their 2025 budget gender responsive and inclusive in view of the increasing level of SGBV in the society.

The CSOs have embarked on visits to lawmakers and other stakeholders at their various states with the aim of facilitating funding that would accelerate efforts at combating rights abuse and violence, especially against women and girls in Nigeria.

In Osun, a human rights activist, Citizen Lola Wey, is leading a team of CSOs including Women Advocacy, Research and Documentation Center and African Women Development Fund to push for the realization of the gender-responsive budget, disclosing that poor implementation mechanisms, lack of coordination, poor enforcement

capacity, limited resources, among other factors undermine the efficacy of Violence Against Persons Prohibition law, which is an instrument for addressing SGBV.

Addressing some lawmakers in Osun State - Abiola Ibrahim, the House Committee Chairman on Works and Transport, Awoyeye Jeremiah, House Committee Chairman on Youth, Sports and Special Needs and Olatunbosun Oladiran, House Committee Chairman on Agriculture - at the Assembly complex, Wey said the development of a gender-responsive budgeting framework will bring about strategic resource allocation for the implementation of VAPP Law.

She urged Governor Ademola Adeleke to invest in programmes aimed at addressing SGBV, asking the governor to create funding for resuscitation of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre in the state.

In an interview with The Point, Wey decried worsening cases of violence against girls and women, identifying improved budgetary allocation as a key way of combating the menace.

She noted that SGBV undermines both social and economic development and the individual's capacity for realising

their rights and potentials under already strained conditions, demanding for gender-responsive budgeting from the state executive government, State House of Assembly, Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

"This budget provision process entails incorporating a gender perspective at various stages - planning/ policy/ program formulation, assessment of needs of target groups, allocation of resources, implementation, impact assessment, and prioritization of resources.

"We believe that this gender-responsive budgeting framework will ensure that the human, financial, material and technical resources needed for policy implementation are provided for. It is designed to justify resource mobilization and to leverage financial and technical resources from multiple stakeholders.

"We believe that the push for this monetary provision will bring about effective implementation of VAPP in the budget. For instance, in Osun State, we believe that having this gender-responsive budget will make the Osun Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) functional and with it maximum operation, SGBV will more tackled,"

she said.

Also canvassing for funding, the Executive Director of Health for the Society, Justice and Peace Initiative, Nkem Chukwu, urged governments at the sub national level to make their 2025 budget gender responsive and inclusive in view of the increasing level of gender based violence in Nigeria.

The human rights activist submitted that "Of utmost urgency is to allocate funds in the budget for government ministries, agencies and departments that implement programmes, activities and projects that impact women and men in an equitable manner and with a consideration of their peculiar needs as men, women, girls, disabled, aged or children."

She stated that it is a mark of lack of political will that governments do not approve funds enough to actualise the projects as proposed in the budget.

Chukwu then charged governments to take a step beyond domesticating VAPP Law to its implementation which involves setting funds aside, establishing and strengthening the relevant institutions, building individual, staff and organisation capacity to ensure implementation. ●

TIMOTHY AGBOR
OSOGBO

Christmas: Nigerians decry sharp rise in prices of chicken, pepper, onions, other food items

Nigerians have lamented sharp increment in costs of food items ahead of the Christmas and New Year festivities.

This is as many civil servants and other small business owners, in different states of the country, said celebrations would be low-key because of high inflation.

Checks in major markets showed a sharp rise in prices of chickens, turkeys, pepper, onions, groundnut oil and other commodities.

This is amidst the cost of living crisis in the country, which is believed to have been triggered by the present administration's policies of petrol subsidy removal and currency floating.

The latest report from the National Bureau of Statistics showed Nigeria's headline inflation increasing to 34.60 per cent in the month of November.

For food inflation, the NBS said it increased to 39.93 per cent on a year-on-year basis, 7.08 per cent points higher than the rate recorded in November 2023 (32.84 per cent).

Findings showed that the price of chicken has increased by 20 per cent compared to what it was around this time last year.

Prices of chicken ranged from N15,000 to N40,000 in Oluode market in Osogbo, capital of Osun State.

Some of the sellers attributed the hike to the high cost of transportation and feeding.

A seller of chickens and turkeys at the market, who simply identified herself as Iya Bimpe, said, "We have prices ranging from N15,000 to N40,000 for chickens; while turkeys cost between N50,000 and N80,000."

She lamented that the current prices are discouraging people from buying, resulting in low patronage.

A five-litre gallon of groundnut oil costs N17,500.

The seller, Mujidat, disclosed that the rise in price of groundnut was responsible for skyrocketing cost of groundnut oil.

Also, pepper sellers at Sasa market in Osogbo, have refused to sell below N300, blaming high cost of transportation fare as one of the reasons for the situation.

Muhammed, an onion seller at the market sells a very small onion for N300 while the big ones go as high as N500.

Many Nigerians have expressed displeasure over the continuous rise in prices of food items, calling for a quick fix.

They said at a time when Nigerians should celebrate at Christmas and New Year, expensive prices of food should not pollute their mood.

A shopper, Tunde Omole, told The Point how he had to beg before an onion was sold for him at the rate of N300.

"Things are getting out of hand and our government should not fold their arms. From January to December, we struggle to eat. At a time when the whole world is celebrating, they still expect us to starve. This is wicked and something urgent should be done to make food affordable for us average Nigerians," he said.

Other citizens expressed similar views, calling for the government to take necessary actions to ameliorate their suffering.

For Iya Aduni, a retired government auditor and now a philanthropist, the harsh economy cannot be an excuse for those who love sharing with others, especially during this festive season.

"I usually visit some orphanage homes

during Christmas and give them food items and cash. I am doing the same this year, just that I will limit my movement to orphanages within my reach and send money to some I can't reach," she said.

She encouraged many who usually give others gifts during the festive season to find a way around the harsh economy to continue the good gesture.

"You must not give a full bag of rice, which is over N100,000 now. Buy half or a quarter bag, buy other items, just give out something no matter how small. You can even pay someone's transport fare, just give something to someone this season, it brings joy," she urged.

As expected, many parks, beaches and public spaces are ready to host patrons this festive season as the owners and operators have stocked drinks, food items, souvenirs and casual staff to meet the festive rush.

"Yes, we know that the economy is not smiling, but it will not stop people from coming out to enjoy themselves this festive season.

"They will squeeze out money because it is once a year fun for many," Yakubu Pam, a theme park operator in Abuja said.

On his part, Magnus Ibiwari, an operator at Port Harcourt beach, noted that even insecurity will not stop people from visiting the beach this festive season.

"We know there is no money, but people have been coming here and spending. More will be visiting this festive season and we will make a killing because people don't want to die from

the troubles of this country, they want to enjoy their small money as much as they can," he noted.

Already, all the beaches in Lagos, from Elegushi, Tarkwa Bay to Badagry have started receiving visitors for the festive season, amid hike in entrance fees and the vendors are very anxious to make a kill.

"Lagosians like enjoyment, they will come in great numbers and we are waiting to excite them with many beach activities. Again, they will come because Lagos beaches are safe, no incidents year-on-year," Saliu Gbogun, a beach operator at Elegushi, assured.

Edem Utuk, an operator at Marina, Calabar, is expecting good business this festive season as visitors are already arriving Calabar for the annual carnival, which he described as the biggest street party in Africa.

"We keep saying there is no money, but the Calabar Marina is always full every evening with people enjoying themselves, as well as many open-space restaurants in Abuja, Lagos and even Uyo.

People will come this festive season to enjoy here, we are seeing them already and more will come. Nigerians are coming to Calabar this festive season because it is safe," Utuk said.

But what speaks more of resilience is the way many are undermining the economic hardship to travel, especially for inter-state journeys.

A visit to the Utako District in Abuja, where most inter-state transport companies are located, tells a better story.

On December 20, the district was in lockdown due to the incredible number of passengers traveling out of Abuja to their states for the festive season.

The same is the case in Lagos' major inter-state transport hubs of Jibowu, Mile 2, Maza Maza and Oyingbo.

While motorists are complaining of the traffic caused by the festive rush, transport companies are smiling as the passengers are gladly paying the fares that have doubled since the second week in December.

From N30,000 in the first week in December, fares to South East routes are now going from N50,000 per passenger; South South routes like Uyo and Calabar are even higher, from N60,000, while Abuja is from N45,000.

"Considering the steady hike, I anticipate that the fare will get to N70,000 per passenger by December 24. It is unfair, but the passengers have no option. Flights are very expensive and night buses are cheaper, but the risk is much," Anselm Odika, a passenger, lamented at GUO bus terminal in Jibowu.

Abasiama Ufot, a passenger at the Okota terminal of Akwa Ibom Transport Company, lamented that the fare is unbearable and that this is the time various state governments should introduce free buses to alleviate passengers' sufferings.

"The governors keep telling us that they are working for our good. We need them to help now and not during the campaign because transporters are reaping off passengers this festive season. We need free buses to ease our sufferings in the hands of these profit-seeking transporters," Ufot

decried.

But Bruno Ezeokoye, a transporter, said that the fare hike is in response to the high demand and passengers' rush this festive season.

"Every business has a peak season and ours is now and we have to maximise the opportunity. By January it will end and governments at all levels are collecting taxes and levies from the fares too.

"We need to maintain our buses, pay staff, especially drivers, pay and service loans used in purchasing new buses and other expenses. So, we make money this season and we also spend it," Ezeokoye said.

While transport companies make money during the festive season, Hyacinth Idama, a driver with Agofure Motors, decried that the drivers bear the brunt.

Idama, who plies the Lagos-Benin-Warri route, said that an average bus driver is overworked during the festive season, with little to show for it.

"Passengers complain of high fares, we work, but owners make the money," he noted.

Apart from transport companies, food and drinks companies are also making a kill this festive season as patronage soars despite the harsh economic realities.

From beer, spirits, wine, local drinks to carbonated drinks, it is incredible patronage as many undermine the hardship to celebrate for once.

Many dealers usually run out of stock as the demand outweighs supply.

"The festive spirit, starting from Ember Month until New Year, is very strong on people considering the way they drink like never before. Our stock is decreasing and that is good patronage. It means that people will even drink more this festive season no matter how lean the pocket is," Yemi Olajide, a drinks merchant, said.

Ike Ogbonna, another drinks dealer, noted that nobody is hoarding drinks now unlike before because the price is high, but patronage is sustainable.

"We did not buy large stock to hoard ahead of the festive season because many are drinking what their money can afford now. So, we have varieties for our customers to choose from and profit comes from across the varieties unlike before when it is mainly Nigerian Breweries and Coca-Cola products that sell most during festive season," he explained.

While Christmas is a day that will come and go, the reality is that many want to enjoy it the best way they can, and those who cannot afford celebration, await another season. ●



Leaders sing discordant tunes as insecurity overwhelms South East

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

attack on innocent individuals by criminals, with attendant high mortality which has now attained near normalcy.

"Considering the development from the big picture perspective, the release of Nnamdi Kanu may not put an immediate end to the insecurity, but it will assuage the rising tension among the populace, who will then join hands to put an end to the rising criminality."

Speaking on the constant kidnapping and killings in the South East, he said, "It is sad that nobody can, but condemn these

atrocities in totality. It is shocking. However, I would not want to go into assessing the governors. I have my impressions and opinions, but I will keep them aside because it is easy to be a backseat driver until you find yourself in the driver's seat. Additionally, all actions taken by our governors are not overt, some are covert. Rather let me engage the main issue which is that the insecurity in our homeland now calls for urgent action.

"Therefore, I am calling on all of us to join hands and put an immediate end to

this embarrassment. Yes, I must admit that the governors have major roles to play, but in the end, my predominant occupation is to see that this situation is confined to the dustbin of history, as quickly as possible by increasing the participation of our Royal Fathers, our Town Unions our Churches and have a "whole-of-society approach" to the issue.

"Most miscreants are known within the various communities. It is also critical, in my opinion, that as we look to "punish" as it were, we should also be looking at

the prevailing societal conditions that push some of our youth into criminality. We need more leadership and resources focused on creating an environment in which real opportunities exist for our younger ones to flourish.

"Our youth need to have a sense of belonging. They need to feel that they are heard and that they have a viable future within the society. How can we expect anyone who feels totally disenfranchised from the system to value and protect that system?" ●

Kwara School in tatters, long forgotten as stakeholders worry over students' safety



The dilapidated school building



turning the space to their hideouts. We want Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq to do something urgent in renovating the school," he said.

Other stakeholders also lamented the neglect, making an urgent appeal for the immediate renovation of the government school.

A group of journalists in the state also expressed concern over the deplorable condition of the school, and charged the state governor for intervention.

It stated that the educational institution serves as a crucial foundation for the education and empowerment of female students, disclosing that the school is currently facing a grave situation that jeopardizes the safety and learning environment of its inhabitants.

"The school's infrastructure — comprising classrooms and administrative offices — has deteriorated

to a point where it is on the verge of collapse. The walls are cracked, ceilings sag, and many classrooms are filled with visible signs of disrepair. This deplorable condition poses not only a threat to the physical safety of our students and teachers but also adversely affects their ability to engage in a conducive learning environment.

"Education is the bedrock of societal development, and the government has a paramount responsibility to ensure that every student has access to safe and effective educational facilities. The current state of the Government Girls Day Secondary School in Okoerin does not reflect the values and commitments of our government to provide quality education for all.

"We are aware that Governor Mallam AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq is a leader who values the importance of education and the welfare of Kwara State's youth. His track record of listening to the concerns of citizens and promptly addressing them gives us hope that immediate action can be taken to remedy this dire situation.

"We urge the Kwara State government to prioritise the renovation of the school buildings, ensuring that they are rehabilitated to meet contemporary educational standards. This effort would not only restore normalcy in the academic calendar but also serve as a testament to the government's commitment to fostering a safe and productive environment for all students," they said. ●

TIMOTHY AGBOR
OSOGBO

Stakeholders in Kwara State have expressed concerns over the dilapidation of Government Girls Day Secondary School in Okoerin, a community in Ilorin West of the state.

They said the lives of students who learn under the collapsing structures are in jeopardy, calling

on the government and other kind spirited Kwarans to come to the aid of the school.

The classrooms and administrative offices of the educational institution are in tatters as weeds have overgrown the premises.

A resident of the community, simply identified as Waheed, lamented the deteriorating school, saying the situation has been discouraging stu-

dents from attending classes.

He also appealed to the alumni body of the school for its rehabilitation, emphasising that criminals have been taking advantage of the ruins to perpetrate crimes in the community.

"This school has produced great personalities but unfortunately, it is now in ruins. All manner of reptiles have occupied the dilapidated structures and criminals are already

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Welcome Onboard

NDLEA arrests smuggler, ex-convict, seizes over one million opioid pills

BRIGHT JACOB
LAGOS

Attempt by an import and export businessman, Ollisaka Chibuzo Calistus to smuggle 256 wraps of cocaine weighing 6 kilograms into the country through the Mallam Aminu Kano International Airport, Kano, has been thwarted by operatives of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency.

The NDLEA spokesman, Femi Ba-

bafemi, said in a statement on Sunday, that the seizure, which is the single largest interception of cocaine at the Kano airport since the creation of MAKIA Command of NDLEA in 2006 was made on Sunday, December 15, 2024 during the inward clearance of passengers on Ethiopian Airlines flight ET 941 from Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire via Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

He said Ollisaka who claims to be into import and export business was subjected to body screening

during which he was found to have packed hundreds of cocaine pellets in his body.

Babafemi said a similar attempt by an ex-convict, Olanrewaju Bada Akorede to export a consignment of rohypnol to South Africa through the export shed of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Ikeja Lagos, was equally frustrated by NDLEA officers at the airport.

He said that the consignment was hidden in a cargo containing gari,

shoes, men's singlets and other items.

He said Olarenwaju was convicted for a similar crime earlier this year following his arrest on December 12, 2023 for attempting to ship 4.90kg tramadol and 2.10kg rohypnol to South Africa through the export shed of the Lagos airport.

According to Babafemi, he was sentenced to two years imprisonment by a Federal High Court in Lagos with an option to pay a fine of N900, 000, which he paid and was

freed before returning to repeat the same crime.

Also, an Italy-based businesswoman Cynthia Akaeen was on Wednesday, December 18, arrested by NDLEA officers while trying to board a Royal Air Maroc flight to Italy via Addis Ababa.

The suspect was intercepted at the departure point of terminal 2 of the Lagos airport during an outward clearance of passengers going to Italy.

A total of 9,190 tablets of various brands of tramadol weighing 6.00kg were recovered from her.

According to her, she was promised 1,000 Euros upon successful delivery of the consignment in Italy.

No fewer than 418,330 pills of tramadol 225mg, 100mg and tapentadol 250mg as well as 8,000 bottles of codeine-based syrup were recovered from a warehouse at a building material market in Onitsha, Anambra state on Tuesday, December 17, when NDLEA operatives raided the market following credible intelligence.

At the Tincan Island port in Lagos, a total of 180,000 bottles of codeine syrup were recovered on Wednesday, December 18, from a container, which originated from Mundra, India.

Babafemi said the seizure was made during a joint examination of the container by men of NDLEA, Customs, DSS, police, and other security agencies at the port, while a suspect Makata Emmanuel, who is the consignee and notify party, was promptly taken into custody.

A total of 293,000 capsules of tramadol, a pistol and 26 rounds of 7.65mm live ammunition were recovered from the duo of Ishaya Wabba, 54, and Samaila Audu, 44, when they were arrested in a Toyota Sienna bus at Pompomari Bypass, Maiduguri, Borno State, while another suspect Sanusi Abdul Hamid, 37, was nabbed at Gwange area of the state capital with 260, 000 capsules of the same psychoactive substance on Monday, December 16.

A 35-year-old suspect Modu Kolera was equally arrested on Wednesday, December 18 at Custom area of Maiduguri with 8.5kg cannabis; 5,000 pills of tramadol; 7,500 tabs of diazepam; 14,500 tablets of exol and 50 litres of 'suck and die', a new psychoactive substance, in his Volkswagen Golf car marked DKW 812 AA.

While a suspect Gafar Saminu, 30, was arrested on Wednesday, December 18, with 33.5 kilograms of cannabis sativa, at Ayete, Oyo State, NDLEA operatives in Enugu same day raided the Aria new market where they recovered 94kg of the same substance.

In Lagos, a consignment of 32 kilograms ephedrine, a precursor chemical going to the South East was on Monday, December 16, recovered at the Young Shall Grow Luxurious Vehicles Park, Maza-maza. ●



Arrested suspects



13 children rescued from suspected trafficker as menace worsens in Anambra

TIMOTHY AGBOR
OSOGBO

The Anambra State Government through the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare has rescued 13 children from a suspected trafficker in Nnewi.

The raid, which took place in the early hours of last weekend was conducted in collaboration with Operation Clean and Healthy Anambra headed by the Managing Director, Celestine Anere.

The suspect, Angela Okechukwu from Umuzumbala Umuzu Otolo Nnewi, who the kids were found in her custody, was arrested and handed over to the police.

Among the rescued kids were four physically disabled persons, one speech impaired, twins, and six toddlers.

Reports indicate that Anambra State has been a hub for child trafficking.

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons had in June, this year, arraigned Clara Chinwe Deborah Ogo, an 83-year-old woman and founder of the renowned Arrow of God Orphanage in Anambra State.

The arraignment took place at the

Federal High Court, Awka Judicial Division, presided over by Hon. Justice Hauwa Yilwa, for alleged buying and selling of human beings for any purpose.

Clara Ogo, a retired Nigerian Army Lt. Col, and a nurse, owns the orphanage located at Nkwelle-Ezunaka, Oyi L.G.A., Anambra State, with branches in Lagos State.

The Arrow of God Orphanage came under scrutiny in 2023 after an investigative journalist exposed

alleged illicit activities related to illegal adoption and sales of babies linked to the orphanage.

Following these revelations, NAPITIP launched a comprehensive investigation, resulting in Ogo's arrest on October 3, 2023, within the premises of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare, Awka, Anambra State.

In September, this year, the state Police Command arrested a suspect in connection with the trafficking of

teenagers aged between 13 and 16.

The command's Police Public Relations Officer, Tochukwu Ikenga, said that the suspect had trafficked numerous teenagers to neighbouring countries.

Ikenga added that some of the victims, who had been taken to Ghana, have been safely returned to Nigeria.

The police spokesman disclosed that the suspect was apprehended following reports of increasing cases of missing teenagers in the state. ●



The rescued children

Politics

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2027: Gladiators in disarray as actors move to form formidable coalition against APC

Atiku

Obi

ROTIMI DUROJAIYE

Ahead the 2027 general elections, 78 associations were reported to have submitted applications to the Independent National Electoral Commission seeking to be registered as political parties.

It was reported that relevant departments within the commission are already sifting the applications to determine those that meet up the commission's requirements for eligibility for registration as political parties.

"It is after that rigorous examination of their applications that the commission would select the ones that meet up its template for registration," it was reported.

The requirements that the applicants must fulfill include national spread; an existing National Executive Committee of the association that reflects the Federal Character principle; the constitution and manifesto of the association must align with the fundamental objectives and directive principle of state policy, as enshrined in the Constitution.

The name, acronym, symbol and motto of the association seeking to transform to a political party must not be toxic as to offend provisions of the Constitution and the Electoral Act.

According to the INEC Guidelines and Provisions for Political Parties, some of the claims to be verified by its relevant departments ahead of an association registration as party are: "The commission, in verifying the claims of an association, shall, among other things, ascertain whether: The National Executive Committee of the association reflects the Federal Character Principle which requires that members of the National Executive Committee must come from at least 24 states of the federation and

the Federal Capital Territory.

"The constitution and manifesto of the association comply with the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), the Electoral Act 2022 and these Regulations and Guidelines.

"The name, acronym, motto, or symbol does not offend the provision of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), the Electoral Act 2022 and these Regulations and Guidelines.

"The constitution and manifesto of the association conform to the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principle of State Policy as contained in Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)."

The regulation further stated that "Where, at any stage of the registration process, it is discovered that the same set of persons submitted more than one application, or that any aspect of the submission is false, such an application shall be invalidated."

Presently, 19 political parties are operating in Nigeria.

The number swelled from 18 to 19 in July last year, when INEC had to reverse itself on the deregistration of the Youth Party, in compliance with judgement of the Supreme Court.

With the growing internal dissension within the dominant opposition parties, multiple sources revealed that gladiators within the dominant political parties have since opened discussions to form a formidable coalition against the ruling All Progressives Congress in forthcoming general elections.

One of the options is to coalesce under a political party, outside the three dominant opposition parties which are now heavily fractured.

A former National Vice Chairman

“DON'T FORGET THE PRESIDENT IS FROM SOUTHERN NIGERIA, SO ARE THEY GOING TO BRING SOMEONE FROM NORTHERN NIGERIA AGAINST THE ZONING ARRANGEMENT? EVEN THOUGH THE PDP IS IN DISARRAY, THE APC HAS PLANTED WIKE TO DISRUPT THAT PARTY AND MANY OTHER MOLES WOULD BE PLANTED IN SUCH AN ALLIANCE AHEAD OF 2027

(North West) of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), Salihu Mohammed Lukman, recently wrote a letter to former President Olusegun Obasanjo, asking him to work with other former heads of state and presidents to rescue Nigeria in 2027.

Lukman in the letter asked former President Obasanjo, Muhammadu Buhari, Goodluck Jonathan and former Heads of State, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (rtd), and Gen. Yakubu Gowon (rtd), to float a new platform that would wrest power from the All Progressives Congress in 2027.

Lukman was reacting to a December 8, 2024 newspaper interview in which Obasanjo was quoted to have said that "A leader made by Satan is bound to fail, while God's chosen one will thrive."

He said, to produce godly leaders without satanic genotypes, Obasanjo and other top leaders have a huge moral obligation of engaging all opposition political leaders in the country to unite in order to produce a functional political party.

In the open letter to Obasanjo, Lukman said, "Everything must be done to put Nigeria on the roadmap of producing godly leaders. Leaders such as Your Excellency, together with Gen. Gowon, Gen. Babangida, Gen. Abdulsalam, former President Jonathan and former President Buhari have the huge moral obligation of engaging all opposition political leaders in the country to unite."

However, as the opposition politicians intensify moves to form an alliance against incumbent President Bola Tinubu's yet-to-be-declared re-election dream, there are concerns the plan to stop the incumbent may fail because major political actors could disagree on a consensus presidential candidate for the 2027 general election.

Many political analysts say that recent moves by the opposition to form an alliance against the APC in the 2027 general election, should immediately decide on an

arrangement on who would fly the coalition presidential flag, that such would not arise and disintegrate the merger in future.

Although President Tinubu has not publicly declared his re-election bid, it is public knowledge across Nigeria that he is nursing a second-term ambition.

In recent weeks, there have been reports that major key opposition politicians including Atiku Abubakar, the 2023 presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party, Peter Obi, the Labour Party candidate, Nasir El-Rufai, former Kaduna State governor, among several politicians, are reportedly in advance stage of merger talk at forming a new political party or adopting any existing political party in the country ahead of 2027.

The planned alliance could be an indication that the opposition politicians have learned their lesson after tasting defeat from the APC in the 2023 general election after they failed to agree to an alliance and work with a common front against the ruling party and its candidate Tinubu.

However, there are fears in some quarters that since major political actors' quest is all to seize power, it may be herculean task for some of them to drop their ambition, while the wrong choice of presidential candidate could also work against the coalition chances of defeating President Tinubu at the poll in 2027 presidential poll.

"Would they agree on a consensus candidate? It is only when they agree on a consensus candidate that such an alliance may work. It may not work because all those guys are all to seize power and may not want to step down for each other.

"I fear that the alliance may fail if they choose a candidate with a controversial history, which the APC could easily have issues to campaign against such individual," a political analyst, Kunle Okunade,

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said.

Speaking further, he noted that it was normal in a democracy for the opposition to come together to challenge the ruling party, but warned that it may not be easy considering Nigeria's peculiar political terrain.

"It is not new across democracy in the world we see opposition form alliances against the ruling party, but they have to be strategic, in this case; many things have to be put into consideration due to the kind of politics we play here," the political analyst added.

For many the APC, the ruling party, knowing the implication of such an alliance would be well prepared for such and could do anything to scuttle the arrangement. They warned that the opposition coalition should be prepared for such intrigues.

Moreover, for some Nigerians, it was the turn of Southern Nigeria to rule the country; they warned that any opposition alliance that would zone the presidency to Northern Nigeria after the former President Muhammadu Buhari had ruled the country for eight years may not succeed.

But this view was dismissed by some Nigerians, who say that the issue was not about the zone the president hails from, but about providing good governance and accountability while in government.

"If it is a merger that would work against the APC for them to be defeated in 2027, I welcome that; what have they done? See the way the country is now; to eat is a problem. For me, it is not about where the President is from, it is about providing good governance and Tinubu is not the answer," Timothy Iwani, an educationist, said.

However, a public policy analyst and public affairs commentator, Temitope Musowo, said it was too early to say or predict the success of any alliance now, noting that it depends on many factors which could work against the coalition.

He wondered who would be nominated as the coalition presidential candidate in view of the zoning arrangement in the country.

"Don't forget the President is from Southern Nigeria, so are they going to bring someone from Northern Nigeria against the zoning arrangement? Even though the PDP is in disarray, the APC has planted Wike to disrupt that party and many other moles would be planted in such an alliance ahead of 2027.

"So, I see trouble ahead, this is a game the APC guys can play well, we have seen them do that over the years. What I am saying is that they should be prepared for the trouble days that would come. We would begin to see court cases from moles coming up against arrangement in the merger," he said.

Speaking recently on such a merger, media aide to Obi, Umar Ibrahim, declared that his principal and the former Vice President, Atiku, are open to forming an alliance against the administration of the APC.

He noted that Peter Obi is committed to a better Nigeria and would be willing to collaborate with anyone who shared his vision, as long as their desire was not state capture.

He said, "This dedication stems from his unshakeable optimism in the country's potential and his focus on the welfare and prosperity of all citizens. It's clear that both leaders are open to working together to

save Nigeria from the APC-led administration's tyranny.

"However, Obi's commitment to collaboration isn't limited to any particular individual or party."

Also, Peter Ahmeh, national secretary to the opposition political parties in Nigeria under the aegis of the Coalition of United Political Parties and the Social Democratic Party, said the country needed more than a coalition between Atiku and Peter Obi.

Ahmeh acknowledged that a coalition could aid opposition parties in defeating the APC and must focus on ensuring free and fair elections.

"Yes, a coalition can help the opposition party defeat the APC. There's no doubt about that. It will also facilitate the easy defeat of the APC.

"But the most important coalition we need at this moment is one that ensures elections are free and fair.

"Because if we do that, even when people form a coalition, we still face the problem of draconian leadership that can cause glitches in the server, or manipulate election results without proper authority behind it. The solution is that our elections should be decided by the polling unit."

The national chairman of the All Progressives Grand Alliance, Sly Ezeokenwa, expressed his readiness to form an alliance with other progressive political forces across party lines to build Nigeria

He said, "APGA proudly has elected representatives within and outside the South East. We are ready and willing to work with all other progressives to build Nigeria because we believe in our country.

"As part of our commitment to reconciliation, we have granted amnesty to party members who are genuinely repentant, irrespective of which side they supported during the crisis."

Speaking recently, human rights law-

yer and activist, Deji Adeyanju, expressed doubts about the success of the opposition merger to unseat President Tinubu in the 2027 presidential election.

Adeyanju noted that the major opposition parties missed opportunities during the 2023 presidential election by failing to unite and present a unified candidate to defeat Tinubu.

He said it would be difficult for any opposition alliance to defeat Tinubu in 2027 because there was a state capture of the Independent National Electoral Commission, stressing those recent off-cycle gubernatorial elections in Kogi, Bayelsa and Edo had proved that Tinubu was not interested in losing the election.

According to Adeyanju, "What's the point of the merger? Is it not to win elections? They can't win any election against Tinubu's alignment. They should continue on their ego path. I encourage them to stay divided so that Tinubu's 'Babalawo' can get a raise.

"They had just one job in the last election because we had a president who was clueless and not in charge. He failed so badly that his body language suggested he never wanted Tinubu to win, so all the opposition needed to do was present a united front, but they refused.

"Instead, they chose to wage an ego war. Kwankwaso said he's the next president, and the same goes for Obi and Atiku. They divided their votes while INEC and Tinubu were united. They had their chance, but they blew it. This Tinubu can't lose any election.

"Didn't we see how the results on IReV differed from what was announced in the just-concluded Edo election?"



el-Rufai



Yakubu

“INSTEAD, THEY CHOSE TO WAGE AN EGO WAR. KWANKWASO SAID HE'S THE NEXT PRESIDENT, AND THE SAME GOES FOR OBI AND ATIKU. THEY DIVIDED THEIR VOTES WHILE INEC AND TINUBU WERE UNITED. THEY HAD THEIR CHANCE, BUT THEY BLEW IT. THIS TINUBU CAN'T LOSE ANY ELECTION

"Tinubu can't lose an election that he organizes, so it's pointless. They shouldn't merge; they should just entertain us and their supporters. There's no need for any merger; everyone should go and test their popularity.

"All I see is a Tinubu-INEC merger, in a country where people's votes don't matter. When you talk about a merger, look at the Edo election, and watch what happens in Ondo as a formality.

"Look at the Kogi and Imo elections, there were no real elections in those places. That's the country you're talking about for a merger? They had the opportunity to defeat the APC, but they were too busy fooling around and playing to the gallery."

A lawyer and national publicity secretary of the New Nigeria People's Party, Ladipo Johnson, confirmed plans by the opposition parties to forge an alliance against the APC ahead 2027 general election.

"I believe that the opposition could do better. However, many of them are facing internal problems and squabbles. In some of these cases you will find that some on the inside are causing disinformation, whilst at the same time posturing and holding positions supporting APC on issues. On our part, we have done our very best to be an active and constructive opposition party. We will continue to do this I can assure you in years ahead," he said.

On what was discussed when Rabiu Kwankwaso's team met with former President Olusegun Obasanjo, two weeks ago, Johnson said, Firstly, it was an opportunity for Senator Kwankwaso to pay Baba a visit and thank him for taking the time to attend the wedding of his daughter. Secondly, it was an opportunity for former President Obasanjo, Senator Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso and His Excellency, Donald Duke to get together to discuss salient issues relating to the country, especially matters affecting politics, governance, insecurity and the economy. It must however be pointed out that political and strategic meetings are on the increase, across party lines and I know 2025 will bring a flurry of activities."

Speaking on the speculations that the opposition parties are planning merger against the APC in 2027 and its success, the ANPP scribe said, "Most definitely. I believe that the mood in the country now is different from what was prevalent in 2022/23. Politicians from various parties seem to be more open to working together and various discussions are going on around the possibility of working together. Whether or not something will happen in that direction remains to be seen. Whether it would be in form of a coalition or whether a merger, only time will tell. The key to it all is what politicians now feel is the need to come together to salvage this country from bad governance and an insensitive government."

On whether the NNPP is open to such alliance ahead 2027, Johnson added, "We have always stated that we are in support of it, and will not rule out anything that will help deliver good governance to the people of Nigeria. We need to ensure that we stop the decent into poverty by many Nigerians and bring about the reversal of the dismal economic performance by this government as quickly as possible. Anything that would bring about this state of things will be embraced by most."

Political experts are of the opinion that unless the major opposition parties resolve the unfolding crises within their ranks, their plan to forge a strong coalition that could stop the ruling APC, and perhaps, President Tinubu in the 2027 polls may not come to fruition. ●

Wike, Secondus still at each other's throat in politics of bitterness

BRIGHT JACOB

Naturally, a former national chairman of the People's Democratic Party, Uche Secondus, and the minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, should be allies in arms fighting for a common cause as they are both members of the same party, but the escalating war of words they continue to engage in have shown that there is no love lost between them.

Politics is at the centre of their frosty relationship and judging by the constant onslaught of vitriolic attacks they have been heaping on each other over the past few years, coupled with the inalienable fact that a general elections season that will determine their fate is forthcoming, the animosity between them will not let up anytime soon.

Wike, a serving minister in Nigeria's governing party – the All Progressives Congress, and Secondus are, as they would have Nigerians believe, members of the PDP. The two men are also from Nigeria's oil-rich Rivers State and it is there that the similarity ends.

A political analyst, Benedict Njoku, told *The Point* "Wike and Secondus are card-carrying members of the PDP. They are also from Rivers State in the Niger Delta. However, even if their lives depended on it, I am sure they don't want any other thing to connect them together

"It is disturbing that Wike and Secondus are still at each other's throat. This is why I view Nigeria as the headquarters for politics of bitterness that is ingrained in our DNA.

"Imagine what collaboration between them would have done for Rivers State. Imagine the growth and development that would have accrued to the state if those two politicians buried the hatchet.

"Well, those who are benefiting from the dispute know themselves. And if I may add, it is certainly not the people of the state that are smiling."

For the record, the story of Wike, who is originally from Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, and Secondus, from Andoni Local Government Area, has not always been characterised by bile and bitterness.

There is also a history of a close-knit political fraternity between them, which came with the usual wining and dining that epitomise most political parapoism, to borrow the word of a former member of the National Assembly, Patrick Obahiagbon.

Secondus used to be the Chairman of the

Rivers State chapter of the PDP before he became the National Chairman of the party in 2017 and he is believed, in political circles, to have achieved this feat with Wike's support.

To his credit, some analysts have given Secondus plaudits, saying that under his guidance and leadership, the PDP experienced its golden age as an opposition party.

His chairmanship took a surprise twist when, a few weeks to the expiration of his tenure, he was suspended from office in August 2021, courtesy of his ward and a Rivers State High Court that affirmed the decision.

Secondus' kinsmen in the PDP, ward 5, Ikuru town, Andoni LGA said the leadership of the party at the ward suspended him due to his failure in attracting development to the area within the period of his stay at the national level.

The "truth" about the suspension was for some time seemingly off limits to Nigerians until Wike rekindled the embers of political tit-for-tat between himself and Secondus when he, in 2022, began to reveal the reasons why his foe was sacked.

Some analysts are of the view that Wike, even though the reasons he adduced are not consistent, decided to go for the jugular because of his failed presidential ambition.

Wike, for all it was worth, contested the PDP presidential primary in 2022 but lost to the eventual winner, Atiku Abubakar, a Northerner.

Wike then asked another former PDP chairman, Iyochia Ayu, who happened to be Secondus' successor, to step down from the position since he is from the North.

According to Wike, it was unthinkable that the party's presidential flag-bearer and the national chairman hailed from the same region.

But Ayu refused to heed Wike's advice, and the former Governor felt slighted and declared that, going forward, he would fight the former PDP chairman – including his supporters – to a standstill.

Secondus was a strong supporter of both Ayu and Atiku and it was obvious that a confrontation with Wike would not be ruled out.

So, to rile Secondus up, Wike first said in August 2022 that his opponent was sacked as chairman of the party because he performed below the expectations of the PDP members.

The following month in September, he told newsmen that Secondus was asked to leave office in order to pave the way for the South to produce a PDP presidential candidate.

And just this year, while addressing his followers and members of the PDP in Port Harcourt in October, Wike said he kicked Secondus out of the party because as National Chairman, he (Secondus) wanted to bring his cousin, Tele Ikuru, to run for the governorship position of the state.

Secondus, too, has taken up the gauntlet. He has been responding in kind to the heavy artillery fire by Wike.

One such incident where he was willing to stand up to Wike was when

some allies of the former Governor took a controversial trip, albeit before the last presidential election, to meet Atiku in Abuja and Wike breathed fire and thunder against them for their actions.

Wike also said he would crush all those associating and conniving with Secondus in support of the then PDP Presidential candidate, Atiku.

Secondus defended the "erring" allies, telling Wike that he would not be Governor forever and that power was transient.

A couple of months before the 2023 presidential election, Wike had, during the commissioning of the Eneka-Igbo Etche Road project, accused Secondus of failing to execute the contracts he got from the state government.

Wike also alleged that in some instances, Secondus fully got the contract sum but failed to complete the projects.

In his own defence, Secondus, who said that Wike lied against him, clarified that he had never been a contractor and never bid for or collected any contract from the state as alleged by Wike.

Things did not get better from there. And this is because when Wike was dilly dalling about making a decision on which presidential candidate he supported, Secondus said he (Wike) did not have the right to impose any presidential candidate on Rivers people.

Wike took exception to Secondus' stance and reminded anyone who cared to listen that Secondus was under a suspension and was, therefore, a "meddlesome interloper" who did not have a say in the affairs of the PDP.

Wike also called Secondus names like "technical adviser to Atiku" and "saboteur" and alleged that the former chairman collected money meant for project works in the state during the tenure of former Governor Peter Odili.

On May 29, 2023, Wike handed over the reins of

power to his chosen successor, Siminalayi Fubara, but currently, both men don't see eye to eye and just like when two elephants fight, it is the state that has been suffering for it.

Secondus has accused Wike of working against the state ever since Fubara took charge of it. He said Wike is hurt because the governor blocked all loopholes that could grant the former Governor access to the revenues in the coffers of the state.

Like Secondus, some other so-called Rivers elders are also supporting Fubara.

They are a former Minister of Transportation, Abiye Sekibo; a former Director-General of the PDP Presidential Campaign Council in Rivers, Lee Maeaba; a former Governor of the State, Celestine Omehia, and a former Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Austin Okpara.

Wike, unfazed, called the men "expired politicians" and accused them of not supporting Fubara during the Governorship election that brought him (Fubara) to power.

Secondus, ever rearing to go, replied Wike by describing him as "a pathological liar" and "mastermind of outright falsehood."

Last week, Secondus was at the Saro-Wiwa Polytechnic in Bori Town, venue of the inauguration of 13.985 kilometers Bori internal roads project in Khana Local Government Area, and he used the opportunity to urge Fubara on.

Although Secondus did not mention Wike's name at the event, he however asked how those "shouting in Abuja" were made. He answered his own question by stating that "It is God and some of us and the leaders that are seated here today" that made it possible."

A Chartered Accountant and political commentator, Ifeoma Ogbonna, in her reaction told *The Point*, "It is only the 2027 general elections that will resolve the rift between Wike and Secondus.

"If Wike manages to give the governorship seat to his new anointed candidate, it will mean that he has beaten Fubara, Secondus and the other Rivers elders and he will be forever immortalized in the State.

"The 2027 general elections, especially the governorship election in Rivers State, will ruffle a lot of feathers and send many actors to early retirement. It will also be the hour of decision for all the contenders and pretenders in Rivers State.

"For the time being, Nigerians should continue to enjoy the Wike-Secondus feud. It is not going to end now and no amount of prayer points on the issue can change the minds of those two dramatis personae." ●

IT IS ONLY THE 2027 GENERAL ELECTIONS THAT WILL RESOLVE THE RIFT BETWEEN WIKE AND SECONDUS

Wike

Secondus

Hot Seat

www.thepointng.com



Yusuf

Tinubu's romance with France'll make Nigeria hotbed for terrorism – Usman Yusuf

Prof Usman Yusuf is a member of the Northern Elders Forum. In this interview, Yusuf, a former Executive Secretary of the National Health Insurance Scheme, speaks on various issues including President Bola Tinubu's romance with France and the Tax Reform bill before the National Assembly. Excerpts:

The Nigeria-France relationship is not new, and it's a significant one. France is Nigeria's biggest trade partner in Europe. What positives do you see from this relationship, particularly when it comes to security and economy?

To be honest, I'm nervous and every Nigerian should be. Okay, let's look at our relationship with France past, present, and the future. France has been in all these Francophone African countries for 60 to 66 years, and they've been kicked out. They've been kicked out of Chad, Senegal, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Five of your neighbours kicked out a colonial master, and all of a sudden, you are hugging that person.

There is something you guys know that we don't know. But let's look at the history of France in Africa or anywhere else in the world. It's not been good. Look at all these countries; you need to ask yourself, why was France kicked out of those places? You are sucking their resources and there is no development in any of these countries.

You go to Chad, you go to Mali, you go to Burkina Faso, you go to Niger, there is nothing to see, but they've been sucking their uranium and gold. All of a sudden, President Bola Tinubu is in this love feast with President Emmanuel Macron and France. We're asking ourselves, why? What do we have in common with France? Literally nothing.

You look at our history with France, it has been one of the major countries that was supposed to have united Nigeria. France opposed the formation and the creation of ECOWAS. France opposed the creation and sabotaged the creation of a single ECOWAS currency, the Eco. And France sabotaged ECOWAS by the young military juntas leaving ECOWAS. Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, ECOWAS is now just a

shell.

Wherever France is, it's no good. Mr. President is not talking to Nigerians. You will remember that after the coup in Niger, the president had just started and he had not even assembled his team, he said we're going to attack Niger, and I'm sure that was prodded by France. We in the North resisted vehemently.

We said that we are not going to allow Nigeria to invade Niger because the fight was going to be a proxy war. The United States of America had one of the biggest drone bases in Niger. Their reason was that they're going to fight Islamists and all that. But insecurity has been much worse where you have bases in these foreign countries.

The reason France is courting Nigeria, and President Tinubu is allowing them, is because they are looking for a place to situate their military base after being kicked out but we will resist it. We in the North, which is a place they are looking to locate these bases, will vigorously resist any foreign military boots on our soil.

Mr. President needs to know that we do not have any historical ties, defence, economic or linguistic relationship with France. And all this cozying the French are doing, the reception they gave Mr President was fit for a king. He will not get that if he goes to England or the United States or anywhere in the world.

What is France getting for that? France wants three things. One, it wants the right to concessions to exploit our minerals, which are predominantly in the North, which is what they've been doing in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. Number two; they want concessions in oil and gas. I heard the spokesman of the President saying that Total is going to invest \$750 million in gas.

And I asked myself, is this true or is this fiction because the same Total, 17 months ago, exited Nigeria and sold its entire stake at \$860 million to a Mauritius-based company. Their reasons were sabotage, theft, oil spillage and high cost of lawsuits.



BRINGING FRANCE IN IS GOING TO MAKE US A HOTBED FOR TERRORISM. IT IS GOING TO MAKE US POORER AND IT IS GOING TO MAKE US SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS. THEY WILL OPEN A BASE IN KATSINA STATE AND BE DIGGING OUR GOLD AND I CANNOT GO THERE AS A PERSON FROM KATSINA. WE'VE SEEN THAT IN NIGER, WE'VE SEEN THAT IN MALI. THAT IS WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN DOING

So, what has changed in 16 months that they're coming back again? After selling its stake for \$860 million and leaving town, now they're coming to invest \$750 million, we were told. It's not going to happen. They're looking for three things. They are looking to come and exploit our mineral resources, predominantly in the North. They are looking to explore oil and gas, which they ran away from, and number three that is most importantly, most worrying, they are looking for a military base.

But, we will vehemently resist any attempt by President Tinubu's government to allow any foreign military base on our soil, particularly in the North because it is going to be a harbinger of trouble. All these Lakurawa things you're hearing, it is the French that started all of them. Wherever France was in West Africa, there was no peace.

So, why would President Tinubu bring them back without consulting anybody? A military base, whether by France, America or any country will be resisted vigorously by all of us, because this is a country we love, and we're not going to allow recolonization of Nigeria like they've done in the other countries.

In Hausa, there is a saying that if you see the beard of your neighbour catching fire, dampen water on yours. France has put fire all over the Sahel, and we are inviting them into our household. No! we are not going to allow that. And I'm calling on our sleepy, do-nothing 10th National Assembly to wake up to its responsibility. They are the ones we elected; they are the ones who should checkmate President Tinubu in all the opaque things he's been doing.

He disappears into France for a working holiday, and nobody knows

what he's going to do there. Like he's been called for consultation, this is a democracy, not a military rule, and we need to know what our government and our president are taking us into. But a foreign military base is a no-no.

And exploiting our mineral resources behind our backs is not going to happen. It's going to be transparent, there's going to be an open bid, and all of us stakeholders must be involved.

Considering the current rivalry between Western powers and China for influence in the global South, how does Nigeria's embrace of France fit into this dynamics, and could this partnership position Nigeria as a critical player in balancing global power, or is there a risk in alienating other potential allies such as China or Russia?

France is just going to use us as a pawn and we are essentially sticking out our neck and giving it to them. And, the fight is not between the West and China. The fight is between the West and Russia. Look at what just happened in Syria. Look at what's happening in Ukraine. Look at what's happening in Israel. It's going to be a proxy war between NATO and Russia, because all these French West African countries are inviting Russia after kicking out America and China.

So, it's going to be a proxy war, and we are not going to be part of it. But we are going to resist it, especially all of us in the North, who are going to bear the full brunt of any recklessness of bringing any foreign foot onto our soil. We are not going to accept it. So, it's not about China. It's about the United States, NATO and Russia. So, Mr. President, whom we elected, must speak to us.

He should not commit us to any

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foreign military presence in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. And whatever investments he makes must be vetted by our National Assembly. But I call on all Nigerians, particularly our elders, our governors, our traditional rulers and clerics, to be on the lookout because danger is coming. Mr President's romance with France is no good news for Nigeria.

How would you want President Tinubu to embrace France, which is our biggest trade partner in Europe just as we are their biggest trade partner in Africa?

That's the scary part because if France could help any country with security, why didn't it help Mali? Why didn't it help Niger? Why didn't it help Burkina Faso? Why didn't it help Chad? They have been there for a long time. Their troops have been there for a long time. Do you think if they didn't help them with all their bases, they are going to help us? Let's wake up. Only Nigeria can help herself by liberating herself from these colonial forces that are doing nothing but stirring trouble in the Sahel.

So, for anybody to think that France is coming to help us with security is deluding himself. The biggest problem we will have is, and that is why President Tinubu is misfiring how to handle the situation after the coup in Niger, which is the increasing insecurity coming to Nigeria because Niger, Chad and Cameroon have been doing a lot of heavy lifting on our behalf, fighting Boko Haram and bandits and ISWAP.

Now, you're not going to talk to them. You're fighting them. They lift their feet off the brakes and these guys roll in. France is not going to help you with that. These neighbouring countries are only ones that will help you with this Lakurawa nonsense because the optics we are seeing in Lakurawa is suspect, I'll tell you.

I heard the other day from the spokesperson of the Defence Headquarters in Nigeria saying in his press briefing that Lakurawa is new and that it is related to the coup in Niger. Hello, Mr. spokesperson, you should know better. This Lakurawa, as we know it today, has been around in this country.

They've been here for seven years, since 2017, at the invitation of local communities to help them fight bandits, to help them do the job that security services could not do. They came under the nose of the Federal Government, under the nose of the state governments, under the nose of all security services, under the nose of all our intelligence services. And now, all of a sudden, we are doing this.

The question Nigerians should be asking is, why did we allow non-state actors to come into Nigeria, settle and continue its activities for the past seven years? And why all of a sudden are we saying Lakurawa just to give a reason for France to come in? That is the only reason. Fellow Nigerians, you can never stop this Lakurawa, Boko Haram, all these bandits and terrorists, if you don't have a good relationship with your neighbours, not France.

Tinubu's romance with France'll make Nigeria hotbed for terrorism'

“
OUR PEOPLE ARE DYING. TOMORROW IS NOT BETTER. YESTERDAY WAS BETTER THAN TODAY. PEOPLE DON'T TRUST THIS GOVERNMENT, THAT IS NUMBER ONE. NUMBER TWO IS THAT THIS GOVERNMENT, DESPITE ITS OVER-BLOATED MEDIA TEAM OF ABOUT 13 ADVISERS, IS NOT CONNECTING WITH THE PEOPLE

Bringing France in is going to make us a hotbed for terrorism. It is going to make us poorer and it is going to make us second-class citizens. They will open a base in Katsina State and be digging our gold and I cannot go there as a person from Katsina. We've seen that in Niger, we've seen that in Mali. That is what they have been doing.

So, fellow Nigerians, we should open our eyes. We in the North will vigorously resist any attempt by President Tinubu's government to allow foreign military bases on our soil. End of story; I don't know how else to say it.

Don't you think that President Tinubu is trying to position Nigeria as a trade partner and not just a partner to be extracted resources from?

Trade partner; how much is he getting from France. They said \$750 million investment by Total. For goodness sake, that's a paltry sum for a country like Nigeria. The other day, they went to Qatar, how much did they say they got, \$600 million and Qatar denied that. The other day, in Saudi Arabia, they said \$800 million. All of these investments, less than a billion for a country like Nigeria? That is paltry.

Why is Nigeria not attracting the big investment that it is worthy of? A Nigeria that has a very large population, a Nigeria that is very rich, a Nigeria that has a very educated population. Why are we not attracting big investment? It is an insult to tell me you went to France and got \$750 mil-



Yusuf

lion or Saudi Arabia, \$800 million, or Qatar, \$600 million.

The President himself de-marketed Nigeria twice in Doha. Remember, when they went, he said there was corruption and he warned the Qatari delegates: 'If anybody asks you for a bribe, come and tell me.' Hello, Mr. President. Thank you for de-marketing your country. And at G20, you heard what he was saying. There is insecurity. There is hunger. There is this. There is that.

You are the chief marketing officer of your country and you are de-marketing the country. I will tell you, real countries that want to invest in troubled spots, they factor in all these and they even get insurance and just come in and pillage the country and leave.

So, we want to see real investment that translates into bettering the lives of our people. We haven't seen that so far. All the loans they've been getting, the World Bank loans, the Chinese loans, where are we seeing them? They have not impacted on the people. They have not helped the Naira. They have not brought inflation down.

Just recently, they got a loan of \$2.2 billion. They got approval from the National Assembly. It took only 48 hours for the do-nothing National Assembly to give them approval to go and get loans. For what? The President is proposing a bill of \$47.9 billion and the collection agencies said they have collected N51 trillion so far. So, why are you getting all this money?

He gets all these loans and the National Assembly does not ask him what these loans are for and we do not see the benefit. So, we must question, especially, in a situation where we are worried there is a state capture by the President and his business associates. You see them signing MoUs in France, on whose behalf, definitely not on my behalf, not on my grandmother's behalf.

They are not in government. Nobody knows about these guys. Do you see them signing on behalf of Nigeria? Do you have your business associates running this country? Nobody can tell me how much the Federal Inland Revenue Service has collected or how much the Customs has collected. Nobody knows what comes in and what goes out. The reason is that our National Assembly is complicit; it is there in bed with this bad governance.

This cannot continue. We must all wake up. Investment from France is not going to solve our problem. Get investment wherever you are going to get investment but we are very nervous about this love fest between our President and France and her president. It's a harbinger of bad things to come because of France's history around us.

And we cannot trust France or any country with our security. Doing that would be foolhardy. Yes, there is insecurity in the North but it is going to get much worse with France around. Do they want to go and fight? Let

them go and do their fighting. We will solve our problems here.

Do you have any concerns about the Tax Reform Bills and how can the government balance this urgent need for revenue generation?

President Tinubu is essentially bringing the Lagos model to the big stage. What is the Lagos model? Tax, tax, tax, tax but you cannot over-tax your citizens to a level that they cannot pay. You've removed subsidies, and you've made them poorer. You've floated the Naira, you've devalued the currency. People are poorer. Why are you taxing them? What you need to do is broaden the tax net instead of overtaxing citizens. That is number one.

Number two, people will say those that are against this tax bill, they haven't even read the bills. It is not the responsibility of citizens to go and read; it is the responsibility of the government that is going to bring any policy to people to come and sensitize and explain to them and get their approval. You cannot just pay hired consultants. They go into their room, bring out an encyclopedia of how we want to do the tax, throw it to the National Assembly and rush it.

I tell you, 99 per cent of the members of the National Assembly have not read the bill. Nobody has time to read this bill. So, essentially, all this brouhaha you're seeing, I took time to read it because I talk all over the place. Some of it is good, but the biggest problem is that there is a lack of trust. Nigerians don't trust this government. The last time you did, Mr. President, you flippantly removed the fuel subsidy. You flippantly floated the Naira and said tomorrow would be better.

Our people are dying. Tomorrow is not better. Yesterday was better than today. People don't trust this government, that is number one. Number two is that this government, despite its over-bloated media team of about 13 advisers, is not connecting with the people. They are not, they think they will stay in Abuja and talk, and people will listen to them. They are not connecting with the people.

You could see from the National Security Adviser's speech the other day, their frustration that the government is not connecting with the people. That was why he said 'critics, we will shut you up.' We want to be shut up with facts, with benefits for our people, not propaganda. The government is not connecting with the people.

The government has not explained anything to the people. Members of the National Assembly do not even understand the bill. And look at the clumsy way it was presented at the Senate the other day. Senator Godswill Akpabio thinks he will be clever by half, recused himself, and put the Deputy Senate President from the North to fight his people. ●

Problem of Nigeria is inability of our leaders to rise up to their responsibility – Peter Obi

The presidential candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 general election, Peter Obi, is the Pro-Chancellor of the Dominican University, Samonda, Ibadan, Oyo State. Obi, who was at the university's combined 3rd and 4th convocation ceremonies held at the university campus penultimate Saturday, spoke with journalists on a number of issues. Excerpts:

How bad do you think corruption has affected our society because you have been very emphatic about this?

I have always said that the issue of corruption has killed the three key things that make a state a state. Corruption has killed entrepreneurship. This is because nobody works hard in a corrupt country. If your politics is more profitable than your industry, you are finished. Secondly, corruption has killed professionalism. I say this because today, not many people are working hard to be a professor or to become anything, because why would you suffer when you can earn a living without it? Corruption has killed hard-work.

I recall telling somebody that we need to deal decisively with the issue of mismanagement and stealing of public money. I used the opportunity to urge our agencies in charge of fighting corruption to always do proper investigation. So, when they tell us that they have seized this or that asset, this property or that money, we would need proof that these things were stolen from public resources.

With that we can learn how to prevent such stealing in the future. It is not enough to say 'we recovered N100 billion'. How did the N100 billion come about? Can we link it to any missing money at the local government, the state or the

Federal Government? It is important that we look at this.

During your presidential campaign, you were emphatic about removing fuel subsidies. Now it has been removed. With what is happening between the Nigerian National Petroleum Company and Dangote Refinery, how does this make you feel?

There is a difference between a planned, gradual removal and a haphazard one. If you had

done it with proper planning, it would have been better, and people wouldn't have been feeling what they are feeling. What I always say about removing anything is that there must be a replacement. So, if you say you are denying us lunch, what are we getting in return for us not to starve during that period?

You cannot just remove something without thinking of or making a replacement available anywhere. If we say we are removing anything, say subsidy from a particular thing, are we putting more in education? Are we putting more into health? Are we putting more in the development of other specific sectors of the economy? These are equally important.

What then would you give as a word of hope for Nigerians because there is so much despair in the land, because Nigerians are going

through a lot?

I have always said that it is a choice. Everything is about the choices we make as a people. A Nobel laureate said this year that Nigeria is one of those countries that know what to do to prosper but refuses to do it. He also said that your development and your growth are linked to your political process. That means it is linked to leadership. Leadership is critical; it is something you need to take seriously.

There is nothing wrong with Nigeria, like Chinua Achebe said. There is nothing wrong with the country called Nigeria—nothing is wrong with our environment, the air we breathe, the food we eat. It is only the inability of our leaders to rise up to their responsibility that is the problem. That means that everything we have seen in Nigeria revolves around leadership. We must get it right so we can move Nigeria from consumption to production. We must be a productive country. Today we are not.

We have the fuel subsidy removed now and we also have all the issues surrounding the action. If you had the opportunity as president, what would you have done differently, how would you have done yours?

I said it should have been an organised gradual removal. It is even in my manifesto. I didn't say I was going to get up one morning and just announce that I am doing this or I am doing that. You have to do a detailed plan before you could say you are going to remove this or that. Like I keep saying, if you must ask the people to fast, you should not be feasting. If you are fasting, everybody should be fasting and you could see that everybody is fasting. That should be it. I'm moving around today trying to help. Everybody should come and move around at the same time.

What will you tell the young men and women who have just graduated from the university as they begin life in earnest?

They must live a life of value even if it is in a society where they have to use those values that have been imbued in them during their studies in building a new Nigeria that is productive. They must prepare to give more to the society than what they want to take out of the society. ●



THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PLANNED, GRADUAL REMOVAL AND A HAPHAZARD ONE. IF YOU HAD DONE IT WITH PROPER PLANNING, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER, AND PEOPLE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN FEELING WHAT THEY ARE FEELING

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ized. If someone wronged someone near me, I would step in to protect them. It's innate, something God instilled in me.

At age eight, going on nine, I walked 11 miles in the middle of nowhere to escape child abuse. God was with me through it all. It's just natural for me to want to do the right thing, avoid wrongdoing, and stand up for good. However, I have faced challenges, including people trying to tarnish my name and malign my character. They seem bent on finding something to hold against me, but I can confidently say that my record is clean. I have not done anything that I am ashamed of or that cannot withstand scrutiny.

Right now, I am battling false accusations. Often, when asked to specify what I have done, these individuals cannot provide any concrete evidence. This question is thought-provoking because it makes me reflect on myself. Occasionally, I may have

spoken carelessly, but even then, I strive to align my actions with my beliefs. I trust in Christ, His commandments, and the values instilled in me from birth. These principles guide me to stand firm, do what is right, and remain fearless in the face of challenges.

I know life is fleeting, and people can die at any time. This awareness drives me to give my best in all I do, knowing each task could be my last. I strive never to do the wrong thing, even in a world where it has become difficult for some to distinguish right from wrong. Many now accept wrongdoing as normal, which is something I constantly pray against. My prayer is for God to help people discern what is right

and to guide them in doing it.

In your years of existence, what lessons have you learnt about life?

What I have realised about life is to be true to yourself. I believe I genuinely love people, though I do not always know if they love me in return. Regardless, I have a heart that loves, and I do not live based on what people say about me. I exercise caution, which is something I am known for, but I do not judge situations or people superficially. Instead, I seek the truth and often ask questions like, "They said you did this; is it true? Can I get your side of the story?"

I have learned not to accept accusations

blindly or judge anyone without evidence. In life, I call a spade a spade. People are often fearful, but if you know you have done nothing wrong, you can dispel any rumours or falsehoods thrown at you. I have also learned that all that glitters is not gold. You need to trust your instincts, be discerning, and, above all, believe in God. I firmly believe that nothing happens without God allowing it, and if He permits something, there must be a reason—something good will come out of it, especially if you have done nothing to justify the adversity.

I always say, "If the wall does not crack, a lizard cannot find a hiding place inside." Good and bad may run parallel, but unless

you have done something wrong, no evil will overcome you. Trials are part of life; no one is exempt from them. Even the scripture reminds us not to think we will avoid trials because we are good. Trials will come, but when you believe in God, follow His word, and live by His precepts, you will neither fall nor mourn.

This belief has sustained me throughout my life. I believe we only die once, so why not live well and die once if that time comes? It is better to do what is right and live a life of integrity. If you have to die, let it be with the assurance that you lived well and followed the right path, including the laws of the land. ●

'Nigerians must stand for what is right to overcome our challenges'

2025 budget fails to address Nigeria's economic woes – Atiku

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NAHCO targets N300bn revenue in five years

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Innovative approaches for Nigerian businesses to overcome challenges and thrive

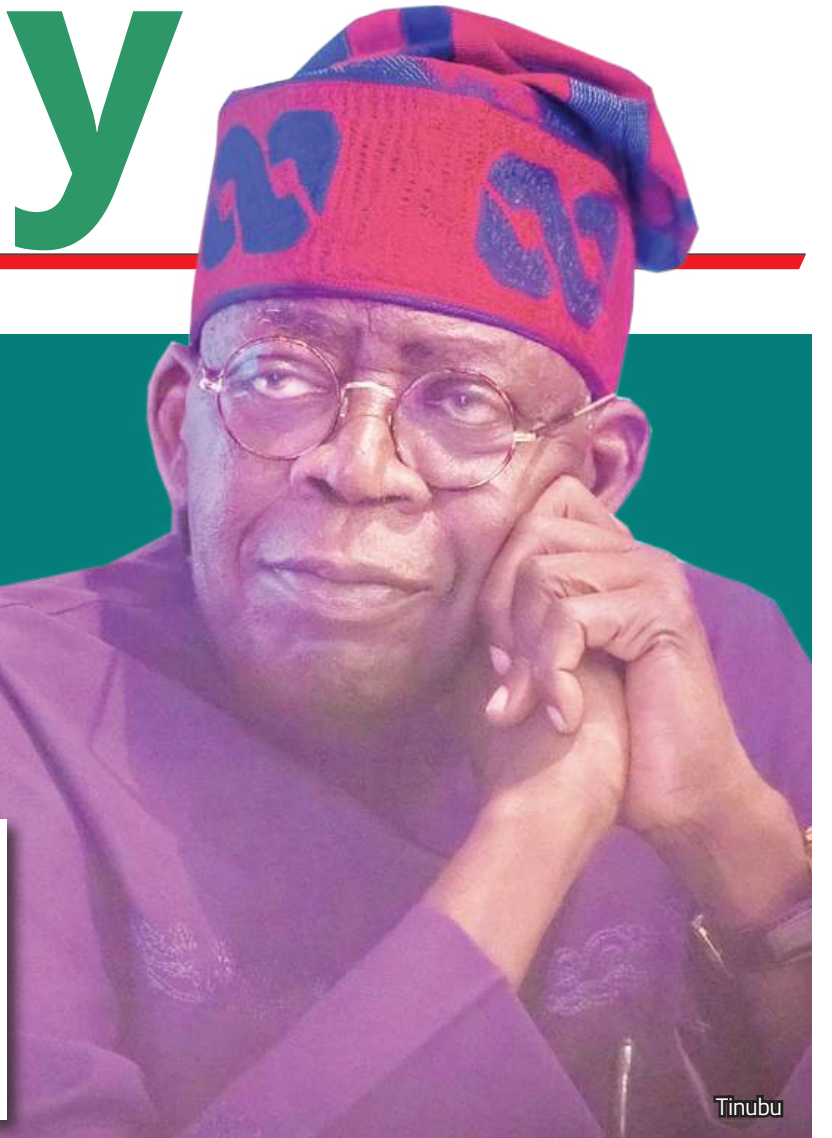
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Economy

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Anxiety as inflation, food insecurity soar amid fanciful projections for 2025

Recent reports from local and global food agencies show that one of the most critical challenges facing Nigeria is food insecurity. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the continued soaring of the nation's inflationary figures is driven by a hike in food prices. In this report, **FESTUS OKOROMADU** reviews stakeholders' calls for President Tinubu to restore hope for the common man by tackling food insecurity.



Tinubu

President Bola Tinubu last Wednesday, while presenting the 2025 budget proposal to the National Assembly painted a beautiful picture of his "Renewed Hope Agenda" especially as it concerns improved living standards for Nigerians in the coming year.

To this end, the President promised to reduce inflation from the current 34.60 percent rate reported by the National Bureau of Statistics in November 2024 to 15 percent in 2025.

"The budget projects inflation will decline from the current rate of 34.6 percent to 15 percent next year," Tinubu stated, adding that "This is an ambitious but necessary budget to secure the future."

The President's promise is coming on the heels of a persistent increase in inflation rate in 2024 climaxing at 34.60 percent in November representing a 28-year high as well as highlighting the deepening cost-of-living crisis in the country.

Unfortunately, the continued rise in inflation rate persists despite the Central Bank of Nigeria's tight monetary policy stance, including raising the benchmark interest rate to 27.50 percent in November 2024.

Thus, financial analysts insist that structural bottlenecks such as inadequate infrastructure, high energy costs, and logistical inefficiencies as key factors undermine the effectiveness of monetary policies, leading to escalating cost of living. Hence, they expect addressing these factors first before projecting above 100 percent reduction in inflation rate within a year. Tinubu is optimistic that his fiscal policy measures can turn the nation's fortune around in less

than a year.

BREAKDOWN OF NBS NOVEMBER INFLATION RATE

The NBS latest Consumer Price Inflation report for November reveals a surge in Nigeria's inflationary pressures with headline inflation accelerating for the third consecutive month to 34.60 percent year-on-year in November 2024, surpassing the October figure of 33.88 percent.

On a month-on-month basis, the headline inflation rate for November was 2.638 percent. Although marginally lower than the 2.640 percent recorded in October, this subtle decline suggests only a slight deceleration in the pace of price increases, offering little relief to consumers.

Food inflation continues to be a significant driver of overall inflation. In November 2024, food inflation surged to 39.93 percent year-on-year, a sharp increase from 32.84 percent recorded in November 2023.

On a month-on-month basis, food inflation rose to 2.98 percent, up from 2.94 percent in October, signaling intensifying pressures in this critical sector. Imported food inflation, which has been on an upward trajectory since 2019, accelerated further in November, reaching 42.29 percent from 40.96 percent in October.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile items like food and energy, climbed to an all-time high of 28.75 percent year-on-year in November, up from 28.37 percent in the previous month.

This persistent rise in core inflation reflects widespread and entrenched price

A MAJOR CAUSE OF THIS FOOD INFLATION WE HAVE BEEN EXPERIENCING MONTH-AFTER-MONTH IS BECAUSE A LOT OF OUR FARMS AND AGRO-ALLIED INDUSTRIES ARE SHUTTING DOWN DUE TO THE RISING COST OF OPERATION

pressures across various sectors of the economy. Notably, transportation inflation stood out, increasing to 30.54 percent year-on-year compared to 29.26 percent in October. This surge is directly linked to higher energy costs, driven by the complete removal of fuel subsidies. However, on a month-on-month basis, core inflation showed a slight decrease, easing to 1.83 percent in November from 2.14 percent in October.

Across the states, the disparity in inflationary trends remained pronounced.

Bauchi, Kebbi, and Anambra recorded the highest year-on-year headline inflation rates in November at 46.21 percent, 42.41 percent, and 40.48 percent, respectively.

In contrast, Delta, Benue, and Katsina recorded the lowest inflation rates, with Delta at 27.47 percent, Benue at 28.98 percent, and Katsina at 29.57 percent. On a month-on-month basis, Yobe, Kebbi, and Kano experienced the sharpest increases in headline inflation at 5.14 percent, 5.10 percent, and 4.88 percent, respectively, while Adamawa, Osun, and Kogi recorded the slowest monthly rises, with rates of 0.95 percent, 1.12 percent, and 1.29 percent.

Food inflation also exhibited significant regional variations. Year-on-year, Sokoto experienced the highest food inflation rate at 51.30 percent, followed by Yobe at 49.69 percent and Edo at 47.77 percent. On the other end, Kwara, Kogi, and Rivers recorded the slowest year-on-year food inflation rates, at 31.39 percent, 32.95 percent, and 33.27 percent, respectively.

Month-on-month, Yobe again led the surge in food inflation with a 6.52 percent increase, while Kano and Kebbi followed with rates of 5.95 percent and 5.68 percent. In contrast, Borno, Adamawa, and Kogi recorded the slowest monthly increases in food inflation, at 0.76 percent, 0.90 percent, and 1.21 percent, respectively.

Financial experts have attributed the spike in inflationary rate to rising prices of staple foods, ongoing insecurity, and recurrent flooding in key agricultural regions, which have disrupted food production and distribution. At the same time, food inflation is said to reflect high-

er costs of imported commodities such as fish, rice, dairy products, and other essentials.

INDUSTRY OPERATORS' PERSPECTIVE

Unfortunately, while President Tinubu believes that he has the magic wand to turnaround the situation in no distant time, operators, especially industry owners seem not to be so optimistic about driving down inflation soonest.

For instance, Director General, Lagos Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Dr. Chinyere Almona, says the chamber is concerned about the continued hike in inflation because, "with persistent and unabated rise in inflation, businesses should prepare for more stress from the burden of higher interest rates as we enter the near year."

She said, "With the raging inflation rate, the unsuccessful attempt of the Central Bank to reduce the currency in circulation, and approaching a high-spending festive period, we are set to contend with even higher interest rates as the expected outcome from the next decision by the CBN Monetary Policy Committee."

She noted that the high inflation rate has far-reaching implications, saying "One of the primary effects is the reduced consumer spending."

According to the LCCI chief, "High food and core inflation erode disposable income, reducing demand for non-essential goods and services. Businesses also face increased business costs, as ris-

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ing transportation, rent and energy costs elevate production expenses, shrinking profit margins.

"Moreover, the uncertain macroeconomic environment weakens the investment climate, deterring both local and foreign investments. Persistent high inflation further threatens economic growth by diminishing the competitiveness of domestic industries and stifling expansion."

On his part, the Chief Executive Officer of Cowry Assets Management Limited, Johnson Chukwu, insisted that inflation is expected to rise further in December 2024, with forecasts suggesting a figure of 35.20 percent due to price increases from festive activities.

He added that factors such as naira depreciation, high food prices, and sustained pressures from energy costs are likely to keep inflation elevated.

While agreeing with the President's projection of reduction in inflation rate in the coming year, he expressed concerns over the high deficit in the budget.

"While inflationary pressures may begin to moderate in 2025 due to base effects, the method of financing the Federal Government's projected budget deficit of N13.08 trillion for 2025 could create additional inflationary pressure," he stated.

An agriculture expert and co-founder Corporate Farmers International, Akin Alabi highlighted factors responsible for the continuous food inflation rate, while expressing optimism of lower inflation rates in 2025 with adequate implementation of government's policies.

"It is unfortunate that the price of food-stuffs is still going to go up even till the first quarter of 2025. A major factor that drove the food inflation in 2024 is the high cost of fuel.

"We also had other factors such as insecurity and climate change effects driving the food inflation witnessed in the country this year.

"All the factors mentioned above jerked up the price of food items and the cost of food production in 2024.

"However, the good news is that as regards the 2025 budget, so much attention will be given to achieving food security in the country.

"If the present administration keeps to its word of achieving food security, I have no doubt in mind that it will go beyond this expectation.

"In 2025, we should begin to see the effect of the policies that have been made by the Federal Government, majorly from the Ministry of agriculture," Alabi said.

He also noted that the interventions should start from "mechanisation, seed inputs and the like and plans around dry and wet season farming, to ensure all-year-round crop cultivation.

"The Presidency has announced that food is non-negotiable and I want to believe Nigerians are going to hold him accountable for those words," he added.

On his part, an agriculture analyst, Omotunde Banjoko blamed the rising inflation on the closure of some farms and agro-allied industries in the country due to high operation cost.

"A major cause of this food inflation we have been experiencing month-after-month is because a lot of our farms and agro-allied industries are shutting down due to the rising cost of operation.

"Most agro-allied factories cannot meet their obligations. Those able to meet up the obligations are experiencing financial issues and are unable to keep up with the volume and scale of what they would have produced.

"This means we have fewer produce going to the market in comparison to the rising demand. The cost of production in the sector is higher, while the purchasing power is low.

Anxiety as inflation, food insecurity soar amid fanciful projections for 2025

"In the farms, we used to have labourers charge between N2, 000 and N3, 000 for labour but now they charge between N4, 000 and N6, 000 for labour per day.

"All these factors are coming together to drive the food inflation we are witnessing in the country," Banjoko said.

He, however, reiterated the need for the government to address all the loopholes driving the inflation rates and sabotaging the attainment of food security in the country.

"We still see a lot of diversions in the agric sector and these are the potholes that the government should be filling, now also that we are preparing to go into a new year.

"All these holes, through which funds are being diverted from the real production, should be blocked if they are truly serious about reducing food inflation.

"Basically, the general cost of operation is a major factor driving food inflation in the country. We have a lot of farmers that are in debt.

"As we have farms shutting down, the cost of inflation will be going up," he said.

FAO RAISES CONCERNS OVER FOOD INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Interestingly, while President Tinubu

has promised to cut down inflation to 15 percent next year, emanating reports from global agencies such as the Food and agricultural Organisation poses a threat to the actualisation of the projection. More so, as it is believed that hike in the cost of food is the major factor driving inflation in the country.

Thus, the latest report by the FAO which raised concerns over the impact of rising flood in Nigeria as it affects food production needs to be taken seriously and addressed properly.

According to FAO, 29 states across Nigeria were affected by flood in 2024 leading to displacement of around 200,000 people while over 2.5 million were affected and caused significant destruction to farmland.

The report stated that about 31.8 million Nigerians are already at risk of acute food insecurity, while the loss of agricultural land due to flooding is expected to deepen poverty and hunger in vulnerable communities.

FAO stated that as at September 10, 2024, 1.3 million hectares of land, including 558,000 hectares of cropland, had been submerged across Nigeria, stressing that floodwaters are expected to rise further as rivers swell and dams near capacity, posing additional risks to communities in Northern Nigeria.

The report noted that tackling food insecurity in Nigeria will necessitate climate-resilient practices, enhanced infrastructure, financial support and technological advancements. But the FAO insisted that the most crucial elements will be policy reforms and collaborations between agriculture's public and private sectors.

RISING HUNGER ACROSS WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

The United Nations World Food Programme on Friday raised the alarm over rising hunger in West and Central Africa saying over 40 million people across the region are struggling to feed themselves during the 2024 post-harvest season.

In a statement released, the agency said the number is set to rise to 52.7 million by mid-2025, including 3.4 million people facing emergency levels of hunger.

Quoting its new Cadre Harmonisé food security analysis released this month, the world organisation said despite a marginal drop in the number of acutely food insecure people compared to last year – linked to improved security and above average rainfall in some parts of the Sahel, food insecurity is worsening.

The number of people facing emergency

levels of hunger has surged by 70 per cent during the post-harvest season and 22 percent during the June-August 2024 lean season, the statement added.

The report listed countries most affected to include Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad, which together account for well over half of the total food-insecure population, adding that forcibly displaced people bear the brunt of the food crisis.

This situation, the UN said underscores the urgent need for enhanced humanitarian action and long-term solutions that effectively tackle the food crisis engulfing the Sahel and the Lake Chad region.

Commenting, WFP's Regional Director for Western Africa, Margot van der Velden, said, "The vicious cycle of hunger in West and Central Africa can be broken, but it requires a fundamental shift in our approach.

"Food insecurity in the region is driven by conflict, displacement, economic instability, and severe climate shocks. Over 10 million people have been forcibly displaced in the region, with significant numbers in Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria.

"Forcibly displaced people are most often cut off from their fields and grazing areas making farming – vital for food security – impossible. Furthermore, climate shocks – especially the deadly floods this year that affected six million people – claim lives and destroy livelihoods, disrupting agricultural productivity.

"The continuing deterioration of food security and nutrition despite significant efforts by governments and partners, emphasizes the need for an urgent paradigm shift in response."

FG EARMARKS N826.6BN FOR AGRICULTURE IN 2025

Meanwhile, the Federal Government has allocated the sum of N826.5 billion to agriculture in the 2025 proposed budget.

The allocation translates to over 100 percent increase from N362.94 billion in 2024 and N228.4 billion in 2023. Capital allocations also rose by 130 percent compared to last year.

The move is seen in some quarters as signaling a transformative approach to revitalizing the sector, bolstering food security and generating mass employment.

The President had told members of the National Assembly while presenting the budget that a key element to drive the projected positive economic outlook next year will be bumper harvests, driven by enhanced security, and reduction in reliance on food imports.

"Food security is non-negotiable. In this regard, we are taking bold steps to ensure that every Nigerian can feed conveniently, and none of our citizens will have to go to bed hungry," Tinubu assured in his budget speech.

Authorities say that in 2025, the government will commit to creating an environment conducive to both local and foreign investment into agriculture, as it intends to rehabilitate dams and irrigation systems, which have suffered from siltation and erosion.

"To ensure food sufficiency and reduce reliance on imports, N826.5 billion has been allocated to agricultural mechanization, irrigation projects, and value-chain development.

"This will not only boost food production but also support economic diversification and rural development," the Director General of Budget Office, Tanimu Yakubu, noted. ●



Alumona



Chukwu



Yakubu

“
TO ENSURE FOOD SUFFICIENCY AND REDUCE RELIANCE ON IMPORTS, N826.5 BILLION HAS BEEN ALLOCATED TO AGRICULTURAL MECHANIZATION, IRRIGATION PROJECTS, AND VALUE-CHAIN DEVELOPMENT

2025 budget fails to address Nigeria's economic woes - Atiku

TIMOTHY AGBOR

Former President Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, has assessed the 2025 budget as presented to the National Assembly by President Bola Tinubu, saying it lacks capacity to address the nation's economic challenges.

In his review of the budget which was presented last week, Atiku concluded that the budget estimate lacks the structural reforms and fiscal discipline required to address Nigeria's multifaceted economic quagmire.

The former presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party in a message he posted on his X page on Sunday, argued that the federal budget of N48 trillion reflects a continuation of "business-as-usual fiscal practices" that bears no good for the country.

According to him, "The 2025 federal budget, amounting to N48 trillion with a revenue forecast of N35 trillion, resulting in a deficit exceeding N13 trillion or 4% of GDP, reflects a continuation of business-as-usual fiscal practices. This represents a persistent trend under the APC-led administration since 2016, wherein budget deficits have been

consistently presented, accompanied by an increasing reliance on external borrowing.

"To bridge this fiscal gap, the administration plans to secure over N13 trillion in new borrowings, including N9 trillion in direct borrowings and N4 trillion in project-specific loans. This borrowing strategy mirrors the approach of previous administrations, resulting in rising public debt and exacerbating the attendant risks related to interest payments and foreign exchange exposure."

Atiku maintained that the 2025 budget is based on weak foundations, insisting that its capacity to foster sustainable economic growth and tackle Nigeria's deep-rooted challenges is questionable.

Raising key issues, Atiku said, "The 2024 budget's underperformance signals poor budgetary execution. By Q3 of the fiscal year, less than 35% of the allocated capital expenditure for MDAs had been disbursed, despite claims of 85% budget execution. This underperformance in capital spending, crucial for fostering economic transformation, raises concerns about the execution of the 2025 budget."

He claimed that the budget is disproportionate in debt servicing,

explaining that, "Debt servicing, which accounts for N15.8 trillion (33% of the total expenditure), is nearly equal to planned capital expenditure (N16 trillion, or 34%). Moreover, debt servicing surpasses spending on key priority sectors such as defence (N4.91 trillion), infrastructure (N4.06 trillion), education (N3.52 trillion), and health (N2.4 trillion). This imbalance will likely crowd out essential investments and perpetuate a cycle of increasing borrowing and debt accumulation, undermining fiscal stability."

"Unsustainable Government Expenditure: The government's recurrent expenditure remains disproportionately high, with over N14 trillion (30% of the budget) allocated to operating an oversized bureaucracy and supporting inefficient public enterprises. The lack of concrete steps to curb wastage and enhance the efficiency of public spending exacerbates the fiscal challenges, leaving limited resources for development."

"Insufficient Capital Investment: After accounting for debt servicing and recurrent expenditure, the remaining allocation for capital spending, ranging from 25% to 34% of the total budget, is insufficient to

address Nigeria's infrastructure deficit and stimulate growth. This equates to an average capital allocation of approximately N80,000 (US\$45) per capita, insufficient to meet the demands of a nation grappling with slow growth and infrastructural underdevelopment.

"Regressive Taxation and Economic Strain: The administration's decision to increase the VAT rate from 7.5% to 10% is a retrogressive measure that will exacerbate the cost-of-living crisis and impede economic growth. By imposing additional tax burdens on an already struggling populace while failing to address governance inefficiencies, the government risks stifling domestic consumption and further deepening economic hardship," he stated.

To enhance the budget's credibility, Atiku pointed out that Tinubu's administration must prioritize the reduction of inefficiencies in government operations, tackle contract inflation, and focus on long-term fiscal sustainability rather than perpetuating unsustainable borrowing and recurrent spending patterns.

"A shift towards a more disciplined and growth-oriented fiscal policy is essential for the nation's economic recovery," he added. ●

Cut allocations to presidency, lawmakers in 2025 budget, SERAP urges NASS

FESTUS OKOROMADU

The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project has called on Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, and Speaker of the House of Representatives Tajudeen Abbas to slash extravagant budget allocations for the presidency and National Assembly.

SERAP's demands made public in a letter dated December 21, 2024 but released on Sunday, highlight the N9.4 billion earmarked for the presidency, alongside the proposed N344.85 billion for lawmakers in the 2025 budget.

SERAP insists these figures reflect unnecessary spending that could be redirected to address Nigeria's growing budget deficit and improve public services.

The agency's Deputy Director, Kolawole Oluwadare, expressed the organisation's concerns, stating, "Any proposed unnecessary spending by the presidency and the National Assembly would amount to a fundamental breach of the Nigerian Constitution 1999 [as amended]."

"The proposed huge spending is neither necessary nor in the public interest, especially given the country's dire economic situation and the level of proposed borrowing to fund the 2025 budget."

The organisation urged Akpabio and Abbas to request President Bola Tinubu to present a revised supplementary appropriation bill reflecting reduced budgets for the presidency and the National As-

sembly.

SERAP further called on the National Assembly to disclose the breakdown of the proposed budget publicly, pressing lawmakers to commit to reducing the N344.85 billion allocated for 2025.

Among the notable concerns is the sharp increase in allocations for asset rehabilitation and repairs. While N14 billion was allocated for these purposes in 2024, the 2025 budget proposes N26 billion — an increase of N12 billion.

SERAP also flagged excessive allocations for travel expenses, revealing that the presidency plans to spend N8.74 billion on local and international trips by Tinubu and Vice President Kashim Shettima.

"The Office of the President proposes N7.01 billion for travel and transport expenses, including N873.8 million for local travel and N6.14 billion for international travel," the letter disclosed.

The agency noted that Shettima's travel budget alone stands at N1.73 billion.

In addition, the presidency's catering budget raises eyebrows, with N546 million allocated for foodstuffs and N71 million for refreshments and meals.

"Many Nigerians will find it quite odd, unfair, and unjust that the government and lawmakers are spending so much on these items in the middle of a public borrowing crisis," Oluwadare noted.

SERAP also called for greater scrutiny of the National Assembly's N344.85 billion budget, including salaries, allowances, and personnel costs. ●

Director General, National Emergency Management Agency, Mrs. Zubaida Umar (left) and the National President of the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria, Bello Lawal, during a courtesy visit by officials of the Association to NEMA Headquarters in Abuja on Thursday.



Inflation may drop to 34.5% in December – Report

FESTUS OKOROMADU

Nigeria's headline inflation rate may drop by 25 basis points to 34.5 per cent in December 2024.

In a report by Afrinvest Research on Saturday, this moderation is attributed to the high base year impact on the food inflation sub-basket and a further recovery in the exchange rate, with the naira expected to strengthen to below N1,600/\$ levels.

The National Bureau of Statistics had earlier reported that the headline inflation rate for November increased by 70 basis points to 34.6 per cent year-on-year, marking the highest rate in over two decades.

On a month-on-month basis, the rate remained unchanged at 2.6 per cent, bringing the year-to-date average monthly inflation to 2.5 per cent.

This is higher than the 1.8 per cent projection by the Federal Government, which implies an annualized inflation rate of 33.0 per cent, compared to the FG's target of 21.4 per cent.

The latest report by Afrinvest stated that food inflation drove much of the increase, rising by 77 basis points to 39.9 per cent year-on-year, the highest in five months.

On a month-on-month basis, food inflation inched up by four basis points to 2.98 per cent. The rise was attributed to poor main harvests due to flooding that de-

stroyed over 700,000 hectares of cropland in 31 states, coupled with persistent insecurity and weak mechanisation in the agricultural sector.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile items like food and energy, also peaked at 28.8 per cent year-on-year in November, the highest in over two decades.

However, on a month-on-month basis, the core inflation rate eased by 30 basis points to 1.8 per cent, the lowest since December 2023.

This moderation was linked to a 3.8 per cent month-on-month decline in average PMS (petrol) prices, which stood at N1,140 per litre, and a recovery in the naira exchange rate to N1,672.69/\$ and N1,720.00/\$ in the official and par-

allel markets, respectively.

The transportation and communication sectors also saw slower price increases in November, rising by 18.5 percentage points and 0.4 percentage points, compared to 20.1 percentage points and 0.8 percentage points in October.

For the full year, the headline inflation rate is expected to average 33.1 per cent, surpassing the Federal Government's projection by 11.7 percentage points.

Experts highlight the need for sustained policy measures to address inflationary pressures and stabilise the economy.

Nigeria's inflation rose to 34.60 per cent in November 2024, reflecting a 0.72 per cent increase from October's rate of 33.88 per cent. ●

NAHCO targets N300bn revenue in five years

FESTUS OKOROMADU

Nigerian Aviation Handling Company Plc has set a N300 billion total Group revenue target within the next five years.

Group executive director, International Business & Corporate Services of NAHCO, Sola Obabori stated this at the company's bell ringing and facts behind the figures' held at the Nigerian Exchange Limited in Lagos last week.

In achieving this, Obabori said "we are embarking on a five-year transformation journey to build a new Nahco, centered around four key pillars; accelerate growth in business, differentiate with operational excellence, lead with digital and deliver a transformed people and culture."

He added that "we are committed to achieving specific performance goals by 2029, while simultaneously expanding our service offerings."

On revenue projection, he stated that "the Company will achieve N38.49 billion at the end of 2024, N71.12 in 2025, N101.93 billion in 2026, N146.07 billion in 2027,

N209.34 billion in 2028 and N300 billion in 2029."

On the subsidiary's target to the Group, Obabori explained that "Ground Handling will contribute N120 billion; Cargo Handling to contribute N40 billion, while NAHCO Logistics Services will contribute N36 billion."

"Others subsidiaries are NAHCO Free Zone, NAHCO Commodities, NAHCO Travel & Hospitality, Aviation Academy will contribute N15 billion, N80 billion, N7 billion and N2 billion."

He added that "this projected growth trajectory compels us to prioritize operational efficiency and performance improvement."

Obabori pointed out that the African aviation industry has shown remarkable resilience in recovering from the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing steady growth in recent years, saying that the Nigerian market has exhibited resilience and growth, even amidst a challenging economic landscape.

He added that NAHCO has consistently demonstrated its ability to capitalize on expanding markets through innovation and adaptation. ●

SMEWatch

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Launching and sustaining a successful business in Nigeria requires overcoming major challenges like limited infrastructure, lack of funding, economic volatility, and more. But through embracing innovation, Nigerian businesses can turn these obstacles into opportunities and thrive.

Here are some innovative strategies Nigerian companies can leverage to tackle core challenges and chart a path to long-term prosperity:

ADOPT TECHNOLOGY TO LEAPFROG INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS

Inconsistent electricity, lack of access to broadband internet, and limited transportation infrastructure complicate Nigerian operations. Businesses can bypass these hurdles through innovative application of technology.

For example, solar and inverter systems provide reliable off-grid electricity. Satellite internet bridges connectivity gaps in remote areas. Logistics technology like GPS tracking overcomes transport hurdles to reach customers. With the right tech, infrastructure challenges become navigable.

UTILIZE MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS TO CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS

Mobile phone adoption continues rising rapidly across Nigeria. Savvy local businesses are leveraging mobile to engage customers through SMS, mobile apps, USSD messaging, and WhatsApp.

Mobile provides low-cost, effective marketing directly into the hands of Nigerian consumers. Businesses must build seamless mobile customer experiences to stay competitive.

HARNESS THE POWER OF NIGERIAN SOCIAL MEDIA

According to surveys, over 90% of Nigerian youth are active across social platforms. This presents a major opportunity for businesses targeting younger demographics.

Develop social media campaigns leveraging local influencers on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Sponsor popular creators. Drive conversations on trending topics. Convert social buzz into sales. Meet Nigerian consumers where they are digitally engaged.

PURSUE INNOVATION PARTNERSHIPS WITH UNIVERSITIES

To gain a competitive edge, Nigerian companies should collaborate with local universities and technical schools through innovation partnerships. Engaging talented students and faculty provides fresh perspective and expertise around developing new products,



Innovative approaches for Nigerian businesses to overcome challenges and thrive

services and solutions.

Scholarships, internships and funding university research also build Nigeria's future workforce. Tapping academic expertise drives business innovation.

LEVERAGE THE NIGERIAN DIASPORA NETWORK

Collaborating with the vast network of successful Nigerian professionals in the diaspora opens up mentorship, skills exchange, international expansion support and even potential investment capital.

Chamber of commerce groups like Nigerians in Diaspora Organization America provide connections into the global Nigerian business community. Their international experience can be invaluable for innovation and growth.

PURSUE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering strategically with the government through public-private partnerships unlocks unique advantages. Government sponsored accelerator programs provide invaluable training,

mentorship and support.

Ministries often fund innovations with

public benefit potential in agriculture, health, education and infrastructure.

While bureaucracy abounds, patient collaboration with Nigerian federal and state agencies offers resources unavailable otherwise. Explore win-win public partnerships.

JOIN A STARTUP INCUBATOR OR ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME

Incubators and accelerators like Wennovation Hub, Tony Elumelu Foundation, and Lagos State Employment Trust Fund provide Nigerian startups and small businesses structured programmes including seed funding, training, mentorship, resources, and access to investors to catalyze growth.

The intensive hands-on support helps finesse business models and strategies. With limited additional capital, joining an accelerator optimizes the path to viability.

CROWDSOURCE IDEAS AND

FUNDING

Crowdsourcing ideas or raising funds from local Nigerian customers and communities builds engagement while gaining valuable insights. Online crowdsourcing campaigns turn customers into collaborators.

Equity crowdfunding platforms like Sparkle raise capital from a broad base of smaller Nigerian investors. The power of the crowd provides businesses advantages funding alone cannot buy.

EMPLOY THE AGILE METHOD FOR FASTER INNOVATION

Traditional rigid project management approaches often blunt innovative thinking. Adopting nimble Agile frameworks like Scrum, businesses can prototype and test new product concepts rapidly through sprints rather than long-term development.

Agile's flexibility and speed enables pivoting quickly. It accelerates learning and innovation. The iterative process is aligned with the pace of modern Nigerian consumers.

LEVERAGE ONLINE LEARNING TO DEVELOP WORLD-CLASS SKILLS

Access to advanced skills development is a major challenge. But online learning platforms make world-class education available to Nigerians on-demand. Providers like Udemy, Coursera and Udacity offer affordable, flexible skills training.

Investing in online learning closes skills gaps for employees in areas like digital marketing, design, and data analytics that drive business success. Upskilling propels innovation.

OPTIMIZE FOR LOCAL SEARCH THROUGH DIGITAL MARKETING

Many Nigerian consumers now research and find local businesses

through search engines and online directories. Nigerian companies must embrace search engine optimization and digital marketing.

Building local citations, positive reviews, search friendly websites, and creating online visibility allows Nigerian brands to get discovered and chosen online by nearby customers. Ranking high locally drives business.

GO CASHLESS THROUGH DIGITAL PAYMENT ADOPTION

Nigeria's cash-based economy hinders financial transparency and efficiency. Businesses should incentivize digital payments and mobile money to reduce cash handling.

Partnerships with payment platforms like OPay, Flutterwave and PayStack enable seamless payments processing. Going cashless improves security, logistic expenses and financial oversight.

JOIN BUSINESS AND TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

Joining respected Nigerian trade organizations like the Lagos Chamber of Commerce that provides networking, industry advocacy, training programs, resources, and support. Tapping into collective business knowledge strengthens individual companies.

Associations boost credibility and visibility for members. Shared capabilities like bulk purchasing also help overcome hurdles. There is power in unity.

While significant challenges exist, innovative Nigerian businesses can leverage technology, knowledge sharing, partnerships, and strategic programs to gain advantages and thrive. The most successful companies will be those embracing creativity, continuous learning and a willingness to try new approaches to overcome familiar obstacles. The time for innovative thinking is now. ●

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Capital Market

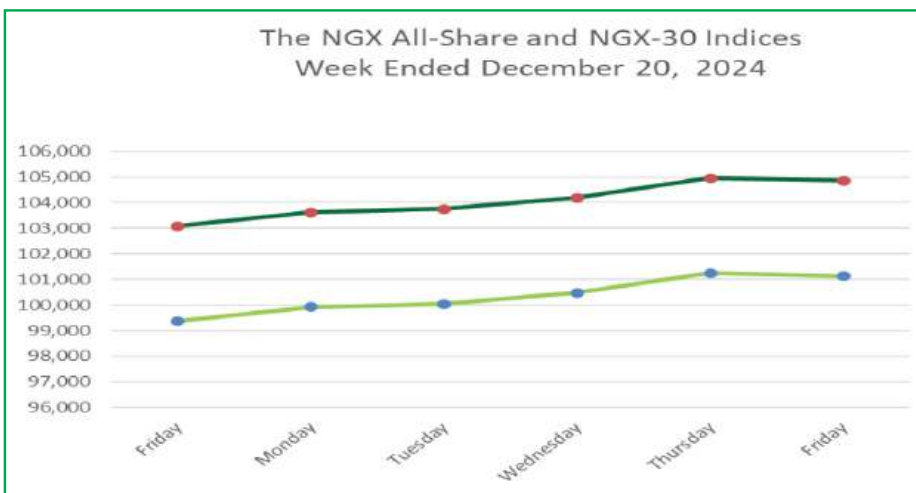
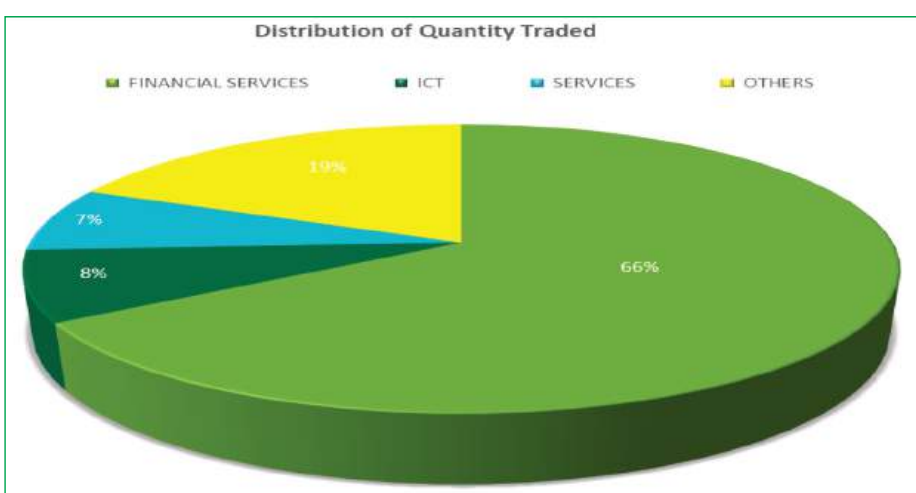
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WEEK ENDED DECEMBER 20, 2024

Company	Open	Close	Gain (N)	% Change
MRS OIL NIGERIA PLC.	132.00	180.00	48.00	↑ 36.36
ETERNA PLC.	22.25	29.45	7.20	↑ 32.36
HONEYWELL FLOUR MILL PLC	4.60	6.05	1.45	↑ 31.52
LIVESTOCK FEEDS PLC.	3.15	4.10	0.95	↑ 30.16
CORONATION INSURANCE PLC	1.34	1.70	0.36	↑ 26.87
U A C N PLC.	23.95	30.25	6.30	↑ 26.30
SUNU ASSURANCES NIGERIA PLC.	6.10	7.49	1.39	↑ 22.79
UNIVERSAL INSURANCE PLC	0.36	0.44	0.08	↑ 22.22
ROYAL EXCHANGE PLC.	0.60	0.73	0.13	↑ 21.67
NIGERIAN AVIATION HANDLING COMPANY PLC	37.90	46.10	8.20	↑ 21.64

Company	Open	Close	Loss (N)	% Change
JOHN HOLT PLC.	7.23	5.88	-1.35	↓ -18.67
MULTIVERSE MINING AND EXPLORATION PLC	5.65	4.60	-1.05	↓ -18.58
UNIVERSITY PRESS PLC.	4.18	3.50	-0.68	↓ -16.27
TANTALIZERS PLC	1.84	1.60	-0.24	↓ -13.04
P Z CUSSONS NIGERIA PLC.	25.00	23.00	-2.00	↓ -8.00
DANGOTE SUGAR REFINERY PLC	35.00	32.50	-2.50	↓ -7.14
C & I LEASING PLC.	4.05	3.88	-0.17	↓ -4.20
WEMA BANK PLC.	8.85	8.50	-0.35	↓ -3.95
HALDANE MCCALL PLC	5.20	5.00	-0.20	↓ -3.85
ELLAH LAKES PLC.	3.13	3.01	-0.12	↓ -3.83



CBN EXCHANGE RATE

Date	Currency	Buying(NGN)	Central(NGN)	Selling(NGN)
20/Dec./2024	US DOLLAR	1535.9275	1536.4275	1536.9275
20/Dec./2024	POUNDS STERLING	1928.5106	1929.1384	1929.7662
20/Dec./2024	EURO	1596.5966	1597.1164	1597.6361
20/Dec./2024	SWISS FRANC	1717.0794	1717.6383	1718.1973
20/Dec./2024	YEN	9.8155	9.8187	9.8219
20/Dec./2024	CFA	2.4156	2.4256	2.4356
20/Dec./2024	WAUA	2004.4440	2005.0965	2005.7490
20/Dec./2024	RIYAL	408.7088	408.8418	408.9749
20/Dec./2024	DANISH KRONA	214.0039	214.0736	214.1432
20/Dec./2024	SDR	2004.3854	2005.0379	2005.6904

Investors win big with N1.06trn gains on NGX as ASI grows by 1.76% w/w

• Ardova reiterates future agenda through innovations

FESTUS OKOROMADU
ABUJA

Trading activities on the Nigerian Exchange Limited recorded new growths in the week ended December 20, 2024 as the equities market extended its winning streak, achieving a historic milestone as the benchmark NGX All-Share Index surpassed the psychological 100,000-point threshold for the first time since July 2024.

The ASI closed at 101,129.09 points, reflecting a 1.76 percent week-on-week (w/w) increase, driven by investors' renewed confidence across multiple sectors. This rally was buoyed by favourable market dynamics, including festive season optimism and Christmas-related activities.

The market capitalisation mirrored this upward trajectory, growing by N1.06 trillion to close at N61.3 trillion, also up 1.76 percent w/w.

The consistent rise underscores strong investor appetite for Nigerian equities, spurred by year-end window dressing and a positive macroeconomic outlook. The year-to-date return on the ASI has now surged to an impressive 35.25 percent, cementing its status as the best-performing index of 2024.

However, even in the face of the bullish sentiment, trading activities showed mixed patterns as investors carefully reassessed their portfolios, factoring in the implications of November 2024 inflation data.

The total volume of shares traded for the week declined by 10.32 percent to 2.44 billion units, while the value of transactions rose significantly by 78.84 percent to N88.81 billion, executed across 48,216 deals. These figures reflect cautious trading amidst strategic positioning by market participants preparing for potential macroeconomic shifts.

Sectoral performance remained predominantly positive, with a robust market breadth as 61 stocks recorded gains against 26 decliners.

The NGX-Insurance and NGX-Banking indices emerged as the week's top-performing sectors, posting solid gains of 8.83 percent and 3.23 percent w/w, respectively, as financial stocks drew heightened investor interest.

The NGX-Consumer Goods and NGX-Oil & Gas sectors also performed commendably, rising by 2.92 percent and 0.99 percent w/w, respectively.

This was driven by a surge in demand for energy and consumer stocks with strong fundamentals, particularly blue-chip counters. However, the NGX-Industrial Goods sector declined by 0.83 percent, reflecting profit-taking activities that slightly tempered its performance.

In terms of individual stock performance, MRS Oil Plc emerged as the top gainer for the week, soaring by 36.4 percent. It was closely followed by Eterna Oil with 32.4 percent

gain, Honeywell Flour up by 31.5 percent, Livestock Feeds appreciated by 30.2 percent, and Coronation Insurance added 26.9 percent to its share price, as investors capitalised on their growth prospects.

Conversely, John Holt Plc led the decliners, dropping 18.7 percent, followed by Multiverse Exploration losing 18.6 percent, University Press shed 16.3 percent, Tantalizer declined by 13.0 percent, and PZ Cussons headed southward with 8.0 percent lost, driven by profit-booking pressures in these counters.

Reviewing the market performance and projecting for the new week, analysts at Cowry Assets Management Limited, say the Nigerian equities market is expected to maintain its bullish momentum, supported by year-end window-dressing activities by fund managers. "Market participants will also closely monitor the impact of the recently published Consumer Price Index (CPI) data on their portfolios and market strategies. Optimism surrounding improved macroeconomic indicators and ongoing portfolio rebalancing efforts is likely to sustain market activity. As the year draws to a close, strategic positioning is anticipated to guide trading decisions, promising an eventful conclusion to a record-breaking year for the local bourse," the stated in the weekly review report.

Ardova reiterates future agenda through innovations. Fast growing energy company, Ardova Plc, has reiterated its commitment to boost productivity in the Energy Sector through various innovations.

Speaking at an interactive session with Journalists in Lagos as part of activities to mark its 60th anniversary, the management of the company thanked stakeholders for their support and pledged rewarding innovations in the years ahead.

The Managing Director of Ardova Plc, Moshood Olajide, who reiterated the company's vision said "We are not just in the business of energy; we are in the business of empowerment."

Olajide explained in detail the company's expansion agenda and various diversification interests.

Going down memory lane, the Chief Strategy Officer, AbdulHakeem Buhari, said "Ardova embodies a vision where energy innovation meets economic empowerment."

The company recently unveiled a lubricant oil blending plant with a production capacity of 150 million litres annually and a storage capacity of 14 million litres in Lagos.

"We celebrate 60 years of strength and resilience. With determination, we look forward to 60 years and more of powering Nigeria's progress.

"As we celebrate this milestone, we reflect on our achievements and the endless possibilities that lie ahead," Buhari said. ●

Our Global Outlook



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CHIDI AMUTA

The same old "Jingle bells! Jingle bells! Jingle all the way!!!" is again uniting Christians and non-Christians in the ancient ritual of Christmas.

Ordinarily, Christmas has become synonymous with happiness and family reunion. Kith and kin come together. Food and drinks flow in households and the grueling grind of the passing year gives way, temporarily, to a short period of rest and leisure. Yet some years in the history of nations have been hard and harsh.

No wonder Charles Dickens wrote Bleak Christmas in early industrial England, a period of hard economic life and unrelieved bleakness. Industrial sooth filled the atmosphere and the classic indictment of the age was captured in the images of under aged children working in factories covered in soot in industrial chimneys. These were literally the archetypal images of the devil of the industrial age. Dark devils sent to earth to curse industry captains and the rulers of the day!

Many Nigerians will swear that 2024 would easily pass as Nigeria's anno Horribilis, our worst year in recent memory. Life has been hard for many. Living costs have escalated, making basic food a luxury for the rich.

Even those who would have loved to get away from their usual abodes to the relative peace of the rural areas and countryside can either not afford to go there or are too afraid of the dangers on most routes.

But Christmas has since deviated from its ritual spiritual essence. It is now part of the commercial heart of the industrial and postindustrial age.

The current commercial and mercantile essence of Christmas is ironically an aberration, an act of disobedience and defiance of an early injunction from the Messiah himself.

Those familiar with the biblical chronicles will recall the image of a young swash-buckling Christ on horseback who rode in anger to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to disperse traders and gamblers who had made the Temple their shop floor. Ostensibly with horse whip in hand, he scattered their wares, upset their trading tables and in anger whipped them as they scampered in different directions.

He charged them with defiling a holy place by converting the temple into a 'den of thieves' and a haven of iniquity. He left them with a permanent sense of guilt and an eternal injunction that the temple was never intended as a place of commerce. It was an act of defilement to convert the place of worship into a place of trade. In other words, the work of God and its holy places was never to be degraded through commercialism and the drive for profit. That was perhaps a rather simplistic interpretation of the relationship between Christianity and capitalism.

By an irony of history, after several centuries of that mass flogging and original injunction, humanity has become curiously united in the global retail frenzy and annual ritual of consumerism of the season of Christmas.

Capitalist multiplication of profit is in fact a glorification of Christian doctrine. He who has, more will be added unto him. From those who have little, even that which they have will be taken from them and added to the rich man's trove. The rich get richer and the poor even poorer! It is written.

The familiar tunes of Christmas - 'Jingle Bells!', 'Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer!!', "Noel Noel!!!", "Silent Nights, Holy Nights!" now openly clash with the clanging of tills and cash registers in mega retail shops as millions of shoppers get immersed in orgies of Christmas shopping all over the world. Walmart and Shoprite play the familiar tunes of Christmas to drown

Merry WhatsApp Christmas

out the harsh metallic ringing of cash tills that must take in returns from your purchases!

Soon after Christmas day, it has become customary for retail business managers, accountants and executives to tally their sales figures and sum up their books as the best way to terminate the monotony of the "jingle bells" season. They grin and dance 'all the way' to the banks.

The profit creed of retail consumer executives the world over has now overwhelmed the sober celebration of the birth of a sectarian messiah. Gold versus God has become the summation of the phenomenon of Christmas. Body over spirit.

Largely stripped of its original religious essence, Christmas has since degenerated into more of a fixture in the revenue calendar of retail giants worldwide. It is estimated that retail vendors of apparel, grocery, decorations, costumes and allied seasonal wares and accessories expect over 65% of their annual turnover to happen over the Christmas season alone.

Christmas has become a holy birthday seized by the frenzy of a global marketplace. In the developed industrial world, retail sales figures over Christmas have become a credible source of statistics for economic well-being.

In good climes, Christmas retail figures climb high to indicate healthy purchasing power.

There is above all else, a certain cultural frenzy and carnivalesque effusion about the entire Christmas enterprise. It has become a season of global frenzy. City landmarks are decorated in glittering and dazzling illumination. Shops, entertainment and amusement centres and sundry retail outlets wear similar dazzle. An effusion of neon lights at night hides the depressing reality of a world that is nasty in the day. The global culture of aggressive merchandising has since overthrown the Vatican and other high places of Christendom in the ownership of Christmas. The battle for the souls of men has nearly been overwhelmed by the scramble for the dollar in every consumer's pocket.

Christmas is not a lone victim of this invasion by the demons of the marketplace. It is like that for most important religious and cultural festivities on the global calendar. It does not matter if it is the Chinese Lunar New Year, or the various Muslim holy observances.

These special occasions have also become important markers on the calendar of profit hungry barons and mega retailers. Take St. Valentine's day for instance. It is no longer a day merely dedicated to the celebration of love in the tradition of Cupid. It has become more of a field day for the explosion of retail trade.

An array of restaurants, fast food vendors, 'mama put' kiosks and merchandisers of assorted inconsequential wares apparel, gifts, flowers etc. Red-themed costumes and accessories are the favourites because Cupid's arrow of love pierced the hearts of the lovers and sprinkled the world with the blood of lovers thenceforth! Profit hungry merchandisers of Valentine's goods nicely disguise their greed as an elaborate ceremony of love.

Christmas is not all about shopping and merchandise trafficking. It has become a time for the global end of year travel and vacation. It is literally a period of travel frenzy.

The global travel and hospitality industries have become part of the Christmas industry. Airlines, cruise companies, hotels witness their largest annual traffic during summer and over Christmas. It is time to catch up with family and friends. This year alone, the airline industry in the

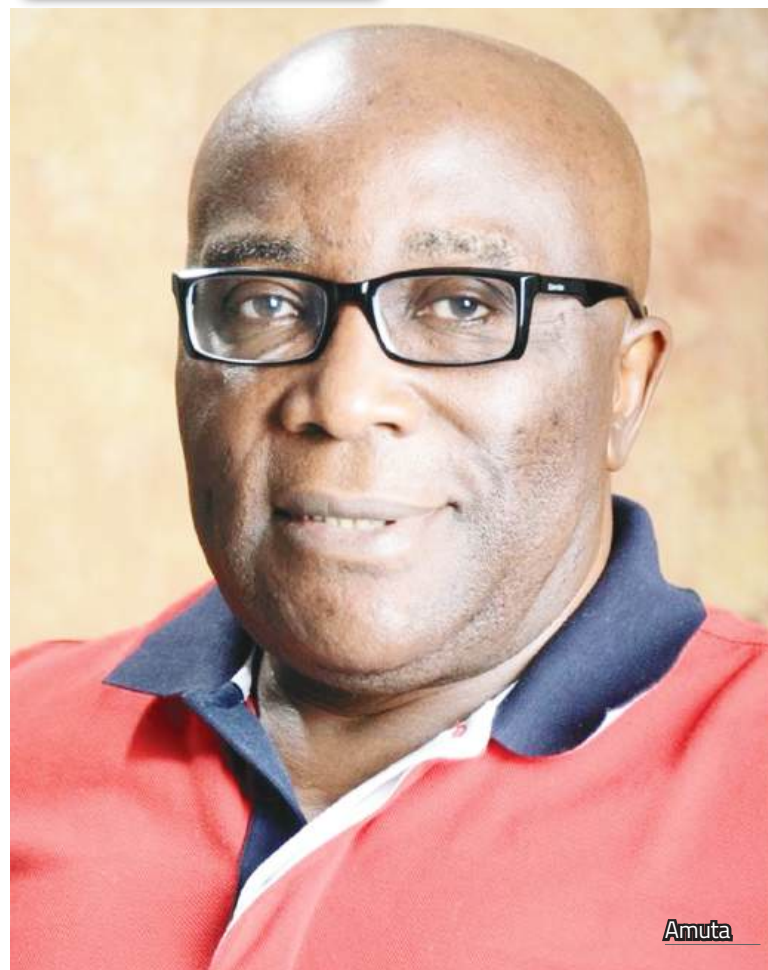
United States estimates that an estimated 10 million passengers will take 97,715 flights through US domestic airports this holiday season while an estimated 113 million Americans will drive to various destinations by road in the same period.

In Nigeria, Christmas is a season of home going for many Nigerians especially in the southern parts. Air fares skyrocket just as transport fares by land transportation also head for the skies.

In the South-eastern parts of the country, end of year homecoming is a cultural constant. It is a time of great reunion among families and communities. It is time to embark on community development projects and to renew the bonds of fraternity that hold communities together.

In recent years, however, the disrepair of the Nigerian state has adversely affected this cultural practice. The places that we used to call home have become strange and dangerous. Danger and violence now lie in wait at nearly every turn on the way home.

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NIGERIA'S POLITICAL ECONOMISTS HAD BETTER TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE SALES VOLUMES IN MARKETS, STORES AND MALLS THIS CHRISTMAS TO DETERMINE IF MR. TINUBU'S ECONOMIC POLICIES ARE WORKING



Amuta

Kidnappers and bad people lie in wait.

A good number of people can no longer go home. Christmas used to be another name for this ritual of home going. These days, when people from those parts are asked: "Will you go for Christmas?", the spontaneous answer is now: "There is no more Christmas!"

Among the things that once used to mark out Christmas as memorable, the Christmas card used to be iconic and ever present. But the Christmas card is dead! Long live the spirit of Christmas fellowship and seasonal greetings.

Christmas greeting cards used to be a sizable chunk of the wares of book sellers, stationers, grocery shops and roadside kiosks all over the world at this time of the year. It used to be part of the ritual of Christmas observance in homes and offices to stage an elaborate display of all manner of Christmas cards from years past. It was part of domestic and office decor if only to display the expanse of one's social network and sphere of good will.

All manner of adaptations of designs became part of the Christmas card world. The most traditional were the ones foregrounded in the snowy white landscapes of the arctic. Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeers, the dog sleighs and reindeer drawn wagons of the frigid arctic were the readiest design motifs on most traditional Christmas cards.

As cultural diversity came, so did the diversity of designs on Christmas cards come to reflect the multitude of landscapes. Turkeys and rams on their way to the guillotine, cooking pots and frying pans and ovens of Christmas luncheons joined the parade of artistic motifs. Individuals were joined by corporations and institutions as dispensers of Christmas cards.

Suddenly, technology crept in to erode aspects of this Christmas tradition. The once thriving industry of Christmas cards and associated printed wares has suddenly been supplanted by a digital revolution. The Christmas card made the good wishes of friends and loved ones tangible pieces with a diversity of mes-

sages. You had something to hold and keep even after the season.

The information age and its enabling gadgets of computers, tablets, and assorted cellphones have come to snatch away the good old Christmas card. Digital instant messaging by SMS, emails, Whatsapp, Tweets have since become the most widespread formats of sending and receiving messages on nearly every subject under the sun.

Christmas wishes are now exchanged mostly through these freeways of the new technologies. Through a litany of applications and formats, individuals can now design and customize their messages on nearly every subject and every occasion. People can even print beautiful greeting cards if they so choose.

Those who have no time for such creative indulgence just send the lazy "Merry Christmas" and copy and paste it to a multitude of recipients including total strangers on your contact list. In a few seconds and at the touch of a button on the keyboard of a two penny cellphone, your good wishes to everyman for Christmas are shared and forwarded to myriads of people all over the world.

Distance has been erased. In nearly every country, the postal services have lost most of their revenue and almost died. Post boxes are becoming moribund. Courier companies have similarly been bled and compelled to find work in ferrying gifts and presents on behalf of Amazon and other mass merchandising multinational companies. Thank God some people still send and receive gifts at Christmas.

In Nigeria, some smart companies no longer encourage elaborate spending on Christmas gifts. They now say there is something called Corporate Social Responsibility. It is better to aggregate the gifts of the company and instead of giving them to individuals or even staff, let everyone join the company by surrendering their Christmas gifts in support of a 'good cause'.

No one has audited how many of these companies really support any good or even bad or doubtful causes. Smart executives have found a way of saving money for these companies through support for phantom charities and 'good' or bad causes.

By far the most selfish outgrowth of this digital invasion of the world of good wishes and camaraderie is the coming of fantasy digital Christmas food and drinks ferried around the social media. Welcome to the era of digital celebrations. Countless Emojis, templates and minute designs of cocktails, clicking glasses, fancy cakes, eye popping turkeys and mouth watering set dinners and other celebratory fares are sent across great distances to friends and well-wishers on their special occasions. Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings. If you ask too many old questions, you get a microwave answer: 'the important thing is the thought!!' 'At least someone remembered you even from afar!!!'

Nigeria's political economists had better take a closer look at the sales volumes in markets, stores and malls this Christmas to determine if Mr. Tinubu's economic policies are working.

We can sum up the present realities of our nation in this Christmas season in the idiom of the great novelist Chinua Achebe. As he lamented, "things have fallen apart".

There is no longer a center let alone one that can hold a nation or a people together. The "arrows" of a bad god have felled many good people and the nation is "no longer at ease".

Our presidential elections have now come down to a frantic and desperate search for "a man of the people." ●

BRIGHT JACOB

When Nigerians rang in the New Year, they were already experiencing a harsh economic climate as well as a perplexing security problem in the country that not only traumatized many but also left many more people defeated.

Despite their predicament, the true Nigerian spirit was clear for all to see as the people persevered, longing for a source of inspiration as they heralded the advent of 2024.

It, therefore, did not take long before some netizens coined the slang term, "No gree for anybody." It went viral and Nigerians quickly embraced and adopted it as the mantra for the year.

The Pidgin English slogan meant different things for different people. Some said it means they will not allow people's opinion to influence them; some said it means they would not give up in the face of adversity and some other people said it means they have to keep fighting and never surrender in life.

Undoubtedly, "No gree for anybody" came to the rescue of many Nigerians by strengthening their almost-pulverised resolve to face difficulties head-on. And, indeed, it reignited in many folks the fire of the Nigerian spirit that is celebrated for its consistency and endurance.

However, while Nigerians were relishing their newfound expression, the Police had a difference of opinion about the fad.

The Force Public Relations Officer, Olumuyiwa Adejebi, warned Nigerians against using the slang, insisting that it came from a "revolutionary sector" and could lead to crises.

"The new slogan for 2023 and 2024 for our young ones is 'No gree for anybody'. We have been informed by intelligence that this slogan is coming from a revolutionary sector that may likely cause problems across the country.

"No gree for anybody is being seen as a normal talk, but in the security community, we have seen it as a very, very dangerous slogan," he told reporters in January.

The Police and Adejebi himself were criticised for their trouble, and they were sneered at after the Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, used "No gree for anybody" to encourage Nigeria's football team, the Super Eagles, to go to the African Cup of Nations and conquer the continent.

Afterwards, popular Nigerian musicians, Portable and Spyro, joined the "No gree for anybody" bandwagon, too.

The musicians released their respective hit singles titled "No gree for anybody," with a message to their fans to always stand strong and not allow themselves to be bullied.

With all that in mind, Nigerians have continued to be imbued with the "No gree for anybody" mentality even as the year is winding down and the future of the country seems bleak.



'No gree for anybody'

New Nigerian spirit of consistency and endurance

Nigerians have been boxed into a corner by rising costs of living, soaring inflation, skyrocketing prices of gas and fuel, high cost of electricity and transportation as well as other crippling effects of the removal of subsidies on petroleum products by the Bola Tinubu-led Federal Government.

Despite all the troubles and pain, many Nigerians have decided to make the yuletide season as memorable as possible by deciding to hold end-of-year parties, go for Christmas shopping and even travel to their villages to celebrate with families and friends there.

A Nigerian residing in Egbeda, Lagos State, Chikamso Nwabuenyi, told *The Point* that although his family resisted it, he held an end-of-year party "to thank God for life.

In Nwabuenyi's view, even though the economy is in dire straits, money still has to be spent here on earth, not in heaven.

"Before the party, my family members were demanding that I jettison the idea of holding a party. They said things were hard and the party would be a waste of money.

"I insisted that I wanted to celebrate it to thank God for life.

"Surprisingly, after the party, those who initially criticised me for it told me that it was a memorable and fun-filled party.

"So, the moral of the story is 'No

gree for anybody.' Do what will make you happy if you have the means," he said.

Another Nigerian living in Imo State, Juliet Okwara, told our correspondent that when it comes to giving, the biting economy cannot dampen her spirits.

Okwara said she shares hampers with her neighbours during the Christmas season. Although she vowed to do so this year, she revealed that the baskets would not contain the usual food and drink she put in them.

"Every Christmas, I share Christmas hampers with my neighbours.

"I put assorted gifts, food and drink into my hampers. I buy beverages, cornflakes, milk, fruit juice and the rest of them, just to make the season a blessed one for my neighbours.

"But I won't be able to afford some of the things I put in my hampers. But will it stop me? No, it will not. I intend to put as many smiles as possible on people's faces this Christmas even if my finances won't be happy with me," Okwara said.

An abacha (African sallad) seller, Mary Ejikeme, said travelling to the East to see her aged parents is on her to-do list. According to her, it will not be out of the question this year.

She added that the high cost of transportation was the only "serious obstacle" she would have to overcome. Ejikeme said the risk notwithstanding, she had decided to take a night bus back home.

"I 'No go gree for anybody' or anything that will prevent me from seeing my aged parents this Christmas," she said with a glint in her eye.

"It has been a while since I saw my parents and I don't want to miss that opportunity this December.

"So, high transportation cost or not, travelling to see them will not be out of the question.

"I know it (cost of transportation) is a serious obstacle but I will overcome it by going home on a night bus.

"I know that it is not safe to travel

at night. There are a lot of kidnappings on the road. The police are overstretched and can't adequately deal with some of the violent robberies we read about. But I don't care.

"My brother, at Jibowu, it will cost me about N38,000 to travel at night to Owerri instead of N50,000 the same eastbound luxury buses are charging during the day.

"I will take the risk and hope for the best," Okwara said adamantly.

A current affairs analyst, Maxwell Igwe, said, "In my opinion, Nigerians are among some of the most traumatized people on earth. The people here have suffered a lot.

"Poverty is rampant and if the ground would open, some Nigerians would have preferred they were swallowed up by it. The situation is that bad.

"The truth is that "No gree for anybody" reminded Nigerians that they must keep fighting to survive all the hardship that has been thrown at them.

"This is why you still see people this season trying to do one or two things to show that they are defiant and willing to take risks.

"But it has not all been easy. And somehow, we have survived to this very day. It means that God is on our side and the hardship and challenges won't be able to finish us off.

"This is why "No gree for anybody" was useful to Nigerians in 2024. It doesn't make money to grow on trees for us, but it reminds us that no mountain is too high to climb and no river is too deep to swim."

Asked to suggest a new motto to be used in the coming year by Nigerians, Igwe said, "Many mottoes readily come to mind.

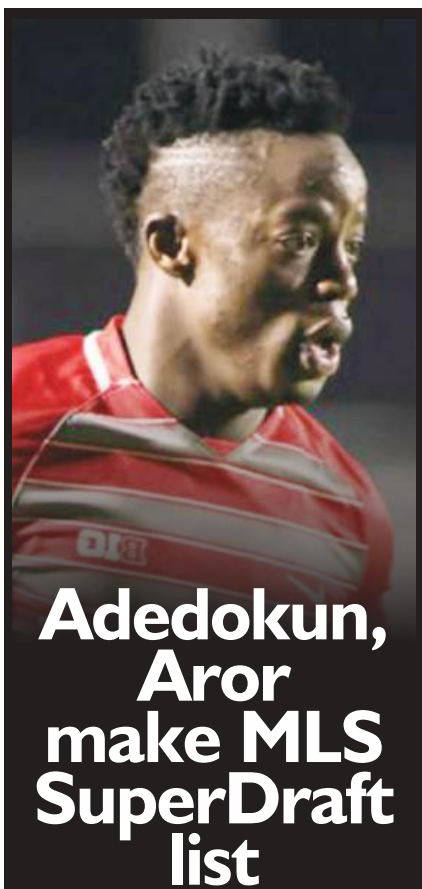
"Something like 'Na we go run the show' and 'Naija no dey carry last' are both good.

"Whichever one Nigerians eventually adopt, the message will still be that we are a proud people that won't be trampled by our situations." ●

I 'NO GO GREE FOR ANYBODY' OR ANYTHING THAT WILL PREVENT ME FROM SEEING MY AGED PARENTS THIS CHRISTMAS

Sports

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Adedokun, Aror make MLS SuperDraft list

ANDREW EKEJIUBA

The MLS SuperDraft 2025 was concluded at the weekend in the United States, with at least two talented young players of Nigerian descent selected, according to reports.

Through the club's official website, CF Montréal confirmed that winger Michael Adedokun (Ohio State University) was selected with the 13th pick of the first round.

The Eruwa, Nigeria native was shortlisted as one of the three finalists for the 2024 MAC Hermann Trophy, honoring the top player in NCAA Division 1 soccer.

Adedokun's standout season for the Ohio State Buckeyes included 11 goals and 11 assists, contributing significantly to their 2024 Big Ten Tournament triumph.

He earned recognition as the 2024 Big Ten Midfielder of the Year and secured a spot on the All-Big Ten First Team.

The Colorado Rapids selected nine players in total during the 2025 MLS SuperDraft, including Barca Academy product Efetobo Aror.

The Rapids selected the midfielder of Nigerian descent (12th overall) from the University of Portland after acquiring the pick and \$75,000 in 2026 General Allocation Money from Austin FC in exchange for a 2025 international roster slot.

Before starting college, he was a student at Barca Academy and played for Barca Residency Academy as well as Phoenix Rising FC.

Aror, a sophomore midfielder for the University of Portland, participated in all 17 games in 2023, starting 12 of them and recording three assists. ●

Aybaba opens up on Osimhen's likely permanent Gala move

Turkish journalist Adnan Aybaba has revealed what Victor Osimhen told Galatasaray coach Okan Buruk about a permanent move to the club.

The report of the Nigerian star moving permanently to the club has been a talking point for some time based on his performances.

His move to the Turkish giants was a result of his inability to secure a transfer to any of the top five leagues in Europe, particularly Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain, who were heavily linked with him last summer.

Due to his superb form for the club, there have been reports that they are considering making his move permanent, regardless of the financial considerations.

Speaking to reporters Aybaba who had a chat with Osimhen recently, revealed that the Nigerian star has ruled out a move to Beşiktaş and his response to Buruk's response to joining the club permanently.

"I spoke to Victor Osimhen himself. I chatted through his translator. I said, 'Will you come to Beşiktaş?' He said, 'I won't. He loves Galatasaray very much."

"Okan Buruk went to Italy with Galatasaray executives at the beginning of the season to buy Osimhen.

"Now he is trying to convince him to stay at Galatasaray. He said to Osimhen, 'Stay here, let's be a family. After Mauro Icardi gets better, you will play with him, you will

achieve great success.'

"Osimhen responded by saying, 'I came here on loan, but there is a great friendship. It feels like I have been in Istanbul for 10 years.'"

Despite rumours of a possible exit in January, Osimhen has reinstated his commitment to Galatasaray and they are likely to enjoy the services of the 2015 Fifa U17 World Cup Golden Boot winner until the end of the season.

He came on as a substitute in Galatasaray's 4-3 win over Trabzonspor at the RAMS Park last Monday and returned to the starting line-up in this weekend's game against Kayserispor.

Buruk's decision to start him has been made easier due to the form of Mitchy Batsuaui, who despite scoring in the last fixture, has been largely unconvincing whenever he is handed a start. ●

Aina reflects on terrific goal against Brentford

Ola Aina has reflected on his fantastic goal for Nottingham Forest in the 2-0 victory over Brentford in the Premier League fixture played at the Gtech Community Stadium at the weekend.

Manager Nuno Espírito Santo's decision to deploy Aina and Neco Williams in the wingback positions paid off as the two combined to score Nottingham Forest's first goal.

There was a change in shape, with three center-backs, four midfielders, and three forwards—a departure from the formation used in the victories against Manchester United and Aston Villa—but it proved effective.

Aina opened the scoring in the 38th minute, side-footing Neco Williams' low cross into the bottom left corner to register his second goal of the season.

Anthony Elanga wrapped up the victory as Forest ended Brentford's unbeaten home record this season to move to fourth position in the Pre-



mier League standings.

Aina, who has started all league games this season, has now matched his best-ever goal tally of two goals in the English top flight after just 17 games in this campaign.

The versatile full-back has been in form for Forest, and he appears to be adding more strings to his bow, which he has revealed to be based on instructions from his manager, Nuno Espírito Santo.

Speaking to reporters on his strike against the Bees, the Nigerian defender revealed that his goal was a result of adhering to the instruction of Santo. ●

Osayi-Samuel fuels transfer talk as he watches Crystal Palace, Arsenal tie from stands

Fenerbahce right-back Bright Osayi-Samuel has added fuel to speculation about a potential return to England in the upcoming transfer windows, according to reports.

2021 Super Eagles invitee Michael Olise was not the only player of Nigerian descent present at the Crystal Palace versus Arsenal clash at Selhurst Park on Saturday evening.

Osayi-Samuel was spotted in the stands during the Premier League game between Crystal Palace and Arsenal, amid rumours linking him with English clubs.

The defender continues to be linked with a potential transfer to Crystal Palace although a move failed to materialize during the January and summer transfer windows of 2024.

The future of the Blackpool academy graduate has dominated

the back pages in Nigeria and Turkey due to his contract situation at Fenerbahce.

Osayi-Samuel will enter the last six months of his contract at the Yellow Canaries in January and can sign a pre-contract with a foreign club in ten days.

Fenerbahce would like to retain the services of the versatile right-back and talks on a new deal have been ongoing since the end of last season.

Osayi-Samuel started Fenerbahce's final match before the winter break against Eyüpspor, taking his tally to 157 appearances for the Istanbul side, with seven goals and fourteen assists. ●



NPFL: Kano Pillars crush Niger Tornadoes in Kano

ANDREW EKEJIUBA

Niger Tornadoes succumbed 2-1 to a last minute defeat against Kano Pillars in an NPFL Match Day 18 tie played at the Sani Abacha Stadium, Kano at the weekend.

It was a bright and exciting opening exchanges early in the game as the two teams were seen trying to assert control on the game.

The Ikon Allah Boys looked to have won a penalty 10 minute on the clock when Abdulrasheed Dabai was hacked down inside the box after being set free by Ifeanyi Okechukwu, but the arbiters overlooked.

The hosts took the lead on the half hour mark when Naziru Salisu's free kick was well connected into the net by Alhassan Rasheed to give the hosts the lead.

Joseph Godstime was also substituted prematurely with a back pain complaint, as the hosts maintained a slim lead into the break.

The visitors made three early second half sub-

stitutions when Okoye, Mendos and Olawale were thrown into the fray in a move that paid off immediately as Tornadoes made the hosts to start chasing the game.

Ifeanyi Okoye beautifully set up Aliyu Mohammed who powered a ferocious shot that beat Charles Tambe in goal for the hosts to level the score.

After several incursions into the visitors area in search of goal, Pillars later snatched victory at the death when an unmarked Ahmed Musa got the ball and slotted home for the winner.

Majin Mohammed praised his players for their spirited performance despite the defeat.

"We had a good game, but it's a defeat and we've taken it like that.

"Injury to my players early in the game changed the pattern of our approach to the game and that affected us.

"Its a good atmosphere here. If you come here and play good football, you get your result. I also commend the fans," the Niger Tornadoes Coach concluded. ●



Chukwueze on song in Milan narrow win against Verona

Samuel Chukwueze featured for AC Milan during the weekend's 1-0 narrow Serie A victory over Hellas Verona on the road.

The starting lineup member Chukwueze was subsequently substituted after 70 minutes.

In the 56th minute, Tijani Reijnders scored the game's lone goal.

Milan's victory puts them good stead for the time being with 26 points on the log.

Chukwueze made 16 league appearances this season, scoring one goal each time. ●

Flykite Productions, the organisers of GOtv Boxing Night, have assured fans of robust security arrangements for the 32nd edition of the premier boxing event, scheduled to take place on December 26 at the Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos.

Themed "Boxing Jamz Music," the event promises an electrifying blend of intense boxing action and top-tier entertainment. Fans can look forward to live performances by the iconic R&B group Style Plus, Afrobeats artists Mayorkun and YKB, and a comedy session by the popular MC Lively.

In an official statement, Flykite Productions emphasised their commitment to ensuring a secure and

GOtv Boxing Night 32: Organisers assure fans of security

orderly experience for all attendees.

"Over the past 31 editions of GOtv Boxing Night, we have maintained an impeccable security record. The safety of our fans remains our utmost priority. For this edition, both the Police and experienced private security operatives from a reputable firm will be on hand to ensure a safe and enjoyable event," the statement read.

Also scheduled for the night is a national super welterweight title fight

between Lateef "Enuoshe" Azeem and Rasheed "Fally Boy" Adeyemo, while Raheem "Badoo" Animashaun face off with Hammed "Ese" Ganiyu in the light welterweight category.

The other bouts will see Sikiru "Omo Iya Eleja" Shogbesan face Imole "System" Oloyede in a thrilling national super featherweight challenge; Akintunde Abolade will square up against Emmanuel Abimbola in the national super flyweight

category; Taiwo "Gentle Boy" Olowu will confront Jafaru "Tanka" Suleiman in a national super welterweight challenge, while Kehinde Owuoye and Emmanuel Bamidele will face-off in the amateur flyweight category.

GOtv Boxing Night 32 is organised by Flykite Productions and proudly sponsored by GOtv. The event will be broadcast live on SuperSport channels, reaching audiences in over 50 African countries. ●



Osimhen's brace inspires Gala to big win!

Victor Osimhen scored twice as Galatasaray battered Kayserispor 5-1 in the Trendyol Süper Lig fixture played at the Kadir Has Stadium on Sunday afternoon.

Making his first start for Galatasaray after recovering from injury and losing the African Footballer of the Year title to compatriot Ademola Lookman, he wasted no time proving his worth.

Osimhen opened the scoring in the fourth minute from the penalty spot after a Kayserispor player had committed a handball and he stepped up to convert, placing the ball beyond the outstretched goalkeeper.

Stephane Bahoken restored parity for the home side, planting his header home from Kartal Yilmaz's corner-kick.

Osimhen was then involved in restoring Galatasaray's lead, he

received the ball from Yunus Akgün, passed it to Dries Mertens, who shot the ball.

Mertens' shot was saved by the goalkeeper but Banş Alper Yilmaz was at the right place to put the rebound home.

Akgün gave the table-toppers a two-goal lead with a magnificent effort, unleashing an unstoppable shot into the bottom left corner five minutes into the second half.

Osimhen was on the scoresheet once again in the 71st minute, received a pass from Akgün and expertly chipped the ball over the goalkeeper to get his brace.

He was replaced by Metehan Baltacı four minutes before stoppage time, and Yilmaz rounded off the scoring with a precise finish a minute later.

Osimhen has now netted nine league goals, just one less than Super Lig's top-scorers Krzysztof Piątek and Simon Banza. ●

The reaffirmation by the Acting Director of Corporate Communications, Hakama Sidi-Ali, Central Bank of Nigeria, that the Supreme Court of Nigeria's ruling of December 29, 2023, that old N1,000, N500 and N200 notes remain valid indefinitely and will be used pari passu with the new notes proves that government knows why cash is scarce and cannot do anything about it.

But to hide her intentions, Sidi-Ali had coyly said, "The Central Bank of Nigeria has observed the misinformation regarding the validity of the old N1,000, N500 and N200 banknotes currently in circulation."

Sidi-Ali's unnecessary reiteration of what Nigerians already know justifies her charge to Nigerians "to use alternative payment channels (which include well-funded PoS and unfunded ATMs) as well as report any case of... capping and hoarding by banks or PoS agents to the CBN..."

Currently, banks ration cash in the banking halls and the ATM galleries. And Nigerians are left in a state of confusion, wondering why the problem that started under the tenure of former CBN Governor Godwin Emezie persists.

Emefiele was rumoured to have embarked upon a redesign, which turned out to be a re-colouring of some denomination of the naira notes, to hamstring the presidential ambition of Bola Tinubu, who eventually won the oyster despite the odds.

This fits into the narrative attributed to the current CBN that some politicians are already mopping up cash as war chests in preparation for the anticipated vote-buying jamboree of the approaching 2027 general elections.

The CBN is merely chasing shadows with its threat to slam banks that facilitate the illegal flow of mint cash to hawkers (who trade currency at social parties) and unscrupulous agents (and possibly POS operators) with a N150m fine.

Its plan to send "secret agents" into banking halls or bank ATM galleries to detect (or deter) cash hoarding begs the question. All that the CBN needs to do is to make enough cash available for Nigerians to meet their daily cash obligations. The CBN cannot pretend not to know that physical cash is cru-

Cash is still scarce



OIKONOMIA with Lekan Sote X:@lekansote1

different prices", Oluwole could only blame the CBN, whose negligence creates the willing buyers and willing sellers of naira notes.

To translate two Yoruba proverbs into English for the benefit of Oluwole and other financial sector trade unionists, who may be too timid to speak truth to power, Oluwole should not use a crooked pole to kill a snake or put his words underneath his tongue.

He must call out the CBN and the Federal Government to end this agony by first determining the daily

cash needs of Nigerians, determining if the physical cash in circulation is enough and looking for money to print more cash to save Nigerians from this agony.

Apart from being a store of value, in this cash-oriented economy, the naira serves as a means of exchange and lubricant for the economy. There is no doubt that the structural scarcity of the naira, caused by the failure of the CBN to simply make the currency available, is constricting the growth of the economy.

South Africa has edged Nigeria out of the (19 countries that have been strangely named) G-20, for the Group of 20 biggest economies of the world. This cash constraint may further contribute to keeping Nigeria at the nadir of the global economic totem pole.

The CBN must recognise that Nigerians still run into situations of cash-only transactions where any form of online banking—electronic transfers within banking halls or the use of apps—cannot work. Bus conductors, "mamaput" restaurant operators, and artisanal workers, like vulcanisers, tailors, electricians and plumbers, demand cash settlements for their transactions.

That explains the huge success of the PoS. Even the Nigeria Inter-Bank Settlement System reported that PoS transactions in 2022 and 2023 were N8.79trn and N10.73trn, respectively.

That is more than 20 per cent of the N52.1trn gross domestic product of Nigeria.

Though these figures are not exactly the total volume of cash transactions within the Nigerian economy in those two years, you may want to consider that roughly \$2.26trn, or about eight per cent, of cash transactions took place within America's \$29.017trn economy in 2023.

This significant percentage of cash transactions within the American economy (which everyone thinks is a cashless society) confirms that cash is still king in some transactions. And it does not look like it will change significantly very soon, especially if you take into consideration that some transactions are deliberately carried out with cash to avoid the tax man or the security agencies.

CBN Governor Yemi Cardoso is not going to be able to act as if he does not quite know what is going wrong with the country's cash disbursement system. And no longer can he and the government continue to scapegoat former CBN Governor Godwin Emezie, who is currently facing his life trials.

The argument by some government apologists that the cash squeeze is a result of CBN's policy to mop up excess cash in circulation to control inflation is laughable. The way to control the current high inflation rate is to control the foreign exchange rate.

The devaluation—or depreciation—of the naira (and the removal of subsidy from petrol and electricity) is the major cause of the current high headline inflation in Nigeria, and it is causing Nigerians to need more cash to buy the same volume of items they bought before the devaluation.

But if the Coordinating Minister of the Economy and other members of the economic management team can find an (albeit long-term) way to make the Nigerian economy produce at least strategic consumer goods, like food and petroleum products, the inflation should abate to an extent.

The CBN needs to admit that its plan to run a cashless economy, which started from the days of CBN Governor Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, is now probably a mission impossible. ●

“ALL THAT THE CBN NEEDS TO DO IS TO MAKE ENOUGH CASH AVAILABLE FOR NIGERIANS TO MEET THEIR DAILY CASH OBLIGATIONS. THE CBN CANNOT PRETEND NOT TO KNOW THAT PHYSICAL CASH IS CRUCIAL TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE ECONOMY.”



cial to the survival of the economy.

The President of the Association of Senior Staff of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions, Oluwole Oluwole, who obviously knows that the CBN emperor is not wearing any clothes, attributed the shortage of cash to the failure of the CBN to meet the cash needs of commercial banks.

Oluwole, who revealed that Nigerians require a (questionably meagre) N20m daily, looked the CBN in the eye and pointedly declared, "Banks have only two sources of cash: the CBN and retailers. The CBN has not met banks' demands, and retailers often sell cash for profit, making it harder for banks to access funds."

While calling on security agencies to crack down on illegal currency trading, advocating for less dependency on cash and acknowledging that a cashless economy is cheaper, safer and more efficient, Oluwole, however, charged the "CBN to have clear statistics, so that they can understand where they are, how they are circulating and where they are circulating to."

But Oluwole got it wrong or was just being politically correct when he told retailers who sell their daily cash takings to PoS operators, "You cannot sell your currency to people for a profit at discounted rates. It is not done anywhere."

If the classic definition of economics remains "rational allocation of scarce resources" and the price consumption curve is still "the demand by one customer for a given product or service at

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