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## News

# AfDB, AFC Sign \$350 Million Long-term Credit Line For Africa's Infrastructure Development

The Africa Finance Corporation (AFC), one of the leading infrastructure solutions providers on the continent has announced that it has signed a \$350 million long-term line of credit with the African Development Bank (AfDB). The agreement, which was signed during the ongoing 28th Conference of the Parties (COP 28), supports urgently needed financing for infrastructure projects to underpin sustainable

development and economic growth.

A statement on Tuesday, explained that the collaboration was a significant milestone in a long-standing relationship, with AfDB becoming a shareholder in AFC in 2019, and the institutions co-investing in multiple transformational infrastructure projects.

“Most recently, both institutions joined the US, EU and governments of Angola, the Democratic

Republic of Congo and Zambia in signing a Memorandum of Understanding for development of the Lobito Corridor expansion, with AFC appointed lead project developer.

“The financing agreement with AfDB will enable AFC to mobilise additional resources towards continued development of infrastructure projects in its focus sectors, including power, transportation, telecommunications, and

natural resources. “These projects play a pivotal role in closing Africa's infrastructure deficit and creating new opportunities for economic growth and prosperity,” the statement added. Speaking at the signing ceremony, AFC

Board Member and Executive Director of Financial Services, Sanjeev Gupta, said: “AFC and AfDB have always enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership and this facility further embeds our shared vision for a prosperous, resilient, and sustainable Africa. “It is crucial that premier institutions in Africa work together and share knowledge, capacity and collectively negotiate on behalf of Africa to drive a development agenda that is both pragmatic and sustainable and ensures that it creates economic prosperity through local manufacturing, value addition and a shift away from the historic extraction and export driven model that has plagued the continent.

## Man arrested in Enugu for impersonating popular philanthropist to commit fraud

Operatives of the Enugu State Police Command have arrested one Somtochukwu Franklin for allegedly using the Facebook account name of a philanthropist Emmanuel Okoh, popularly known as “Okwuluora” to defraud people. Franklin, aged 26, was arrested by the operatives on December 3, 2023, at about 12:30 p.m. A preliminary investigation revealed that the suspect confessed to committing the crime. He

disclosed that he created the fake “Okwuluora” Facebook account in January 2023 and has since been using it to solicit funds from his over thirty-three thousand followers.

According to the suspect, he usually waits for the real “Okwuluora” to make a post soliciting support for persons in situations requiring financial assistance. He then immediately copies and posts them on the fake Facebook account, changing the beneficiary's account details to

his own, thereby fraudulently obtaining funds from unsuspecting donors.

Speaking further, the suspect revealed that he has received funds running into tens of thousands of Naira from donors. Meanwhile, the Commissioner of Police, CP Kanayo Uzuegbu, has ordered the State Criminal Intelligence and Investigation Department to conduct a further thorough investigation and ensure the timely prosecution of the suspect.

## Abia partners Poland, Bulgaria to grow strategic sectors

Abia State government has opened its doors to enter into economic partnership with Poland and Bulgaria in order to enhance the development of the state. Governor Alex Otti expressed Abia's disposition to robust economic collaborations with the two European nations when he received their Ambassadors on separate official visits to the state.

The Polish Ambassador to Nigeria, Mrs. Joan Tarnawska, with her delegation was the first that visited while her Bulgarian counterpart, Yanko Yordanov, also came with his delegation. While the delegation from Poland were interested in partnering Abia in the area of agriculture, mining, education and culture, Bulgaria was attracted to agriculture, trade, education and human capital development.

Otti, who was elated by the interest shown in Abia by the two countries, said his government would welcome any partnership that could lead to the growth of the state's economy. “There can't be a better state to partner with than Abia, and I say that for a lot of

reasons,” Otti told the Polish delegation.

He specifically stated that, “our dreams are very big” in such sectors as agriculture and education, hinting that Abia was desirous of exporting skilled workers. “Our people are very creative, very innovative and very focused. They produce virtually everything; they may not be as sophisticated as those in Europe but they work,” Otti added.

The Polish Ambassador, who disclosed that the visit was her first to the South-east of Nigeria, said there was a lot that can be done together between Nigeria and Poland.

“Nigeria is a country of great opportunities and potentials. We would like to tap into that potential and look for new avenues of cooperation between Poland and Nigeria, and in particular your state,” she told the Abia governor.

Tarnawska, recalled that the President of Poland visited Nigeria last year during which, “we signed an MoU on cooperation, agriculture and I hope that we can on this basis develop even closer ties with

Nigeria and with Abia State.” Meanwhile, Otti told the Bulgarian delegation that, “the government we have in Abia State right now is a very serious government, focused on delivering good governance to our people.”

He said Bulgaria has come at the right time to assist Abia grow its economy, adding that he was satisfied with the areas the Bulgarian government has chosen to intervene in Abia.

The Bulgarian Ambassador to Nigeria, said the delegation was in the State to seek collaboration with Abia in order to boost agriculture, trade, education and human capital development. “In more concrete terms, the project we wish to bring to your attention will be offering comprehensive understanding about the need to develop, not only economic ties, but also the people-to-people exchange,” Yordanov said.

“Abia State is widely known as a State where all the opportunities exist. This is why my country and private investors desire to collaborate and develop partnership with Your Excellency,” he added.

## Mbah presents N521.6bn 2024 budget to State Assembly

Governor Peter Mbah of Enugu State has presented the 2024 budget to the tune of N521.6 billion to the state House of Assembly.

While presenting the proposed budget allocation tagged, 'Budget of Disruptive Economic Growth' to the Enugu State

House of Assembly on Tuesday, Mbah said it was an ambitious and highest budgetary allocation in the state's history meant to expand the economy of Enugu.

The governor also earmarked 33 percent in 2024 budgetary allocation, which amounts to N134.5 billion, to the education sector of the state.

It is recorded that Enugu State under Mbah is the first state in Nigeria to allocate such a bogus percentage and amount to education, thus surpassing the United Nation's recommended 25 percent threshold for education.

According to him, in the total estimate, Enugu State earmarks

## Soludo hails Armed Forces for fostering peace, unity

Governor of Anambra State, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, has expressed gratitude to the Nigerian Armed Forces, saying that the combined team, including the Army, Police, Navy, Air force, Department of State Services (DSS) and the state vigilante services, have worked in collaboration to achieve peace and unity, which helped to move the country forward.

Soludo stated this when he received in audience the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 82 Division, Nigerian Army, Major General Hassan Taiwo Dada, at the Governor's Lodge, Amawbia.

“A lot of these officers paid the supreme sacrifice, and while we pray for the repose of their soul, we want to say they never died in vain, because the cause for which they died will be

accomplished, which is the full security of life and property,” the Governor noted. He regretted the situation where a large number of youths were in the bush, engaging in criminality, kidnapping and fighting their pockets, which he describe as 'lucrative criminality.'

“Several of these youths have been brainwashed and dying needlessly. My heart bleeds when you see these kids fighting for absolute nothing. We have called on them to come out of the bush, and we shall train them in our various empowerment programmes,” he added. Earlier, Major General Dada reiterated his commitment to ensuring there is security in all Southeast states and Cross River state under his purview.

He said: “Since I came on board, we can all attest to the

level of security we have been able to achieve, and we don't intend going back on this.

“We will continue to work with other security agencies and make sure all abiding citizens, particularly ndi Anambra, go about their businesses without any fear.” “I want to seek your indulgence in the area of intelligence. If there is any information related to security, we will appreciate it from well-meaning ndi Anambra and the government as well.”

Chief of Staff to the Governor, Ernest Ezeajughi, Special Adviser on Security, AVM Ben Chiobi (rtd), Special Adviser on Political Matters, Dr. Alex Obiobolu, Commander, 302 Artillery Regiment (302 AR) Nigerian Army, Onitsha, Anambra State, Col. M.B. Abubakar, among other senior ranking officers, attended the event.

## Ikpeazu advocates Folk Medicine to check organ failures

The immediate past Governor of Abia State, Dr. Okezie Ikpeazu, has called for the validation of folk medicine in Nigeria as one of the best ways of finding lasting solutions to the rising cases of organ failures. The former governor, who is a teacher and author in Pharmacology and Environmental Biochemistry, said this during a one-day research products exhibition and award ceremony organised by The Nigerian Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (NSBMB) on Tuesday in Abuja. He called for a thorough investigation into the people's food consumption patterns with a view to finding the causes of organ failure which has become prevalent in our society lately and proffer solution to the menace through folk medicine.

Ikpeazu said: “I am particularly interested in the validation of folk medicine in Nigeria. Lately, there has been a high increase in cases of organ failure, especially the kidney. I think we need to look at some of the things that we are

consuming that we were not consuming before and try to bring out what could be the culprit that is poisoning our kidneys, and causing organ failure.”

According to him, there is need for collaboration between the biochemists and professional disciplines for advancement in medicine and food technology. “People from other disciplines claim the hard work of biochemists. Therefore, we need a handshake between the industry and research labs. So much is going on in our various laboratories, but not until the industries open their eyes to some of the outcomes and fallouts from the labs, can we begin to talk about advancement in medicine, food technology, or even science and technology. “I pray that a time will come when the industries will understand that the raw materials that they need are found in the labs where biochemists are working very hard, toiling day and night,” he said. Ikpeazu, who was described as a silent achiever by the President of NSBMB, Professor Matthew Wegwu,

was honoured with a Legacy Award as ‘A Transformative Scholar In Leadership’ by the NSBMB. Speaking on the contribution of Ikpeazu to the advancement of Biochemistry, Professor Wegwu said: “Your Excellency, Sir, we are very proud of you. The obvious is that Biochemists are not noisemakers, and you epitomize that attribute. You are a silent achiever.

We went through your records and achievements as governor of Abia State, we arrived at one thing, that you are a transformative scholar in leadership. “I was privileged to assess your work. Even as a governor, you have beautiful publications and journals and over 45 published articles in Environmental Biochemistry. I was present at the public presentation of your book – The Biochemistry of Environmental Pollution, co-authored, as a teacher in environmental biochemistry. “We are indeed proud of you, and remain grateful to you for representing us while you served as governor of Abia State,” Wegwu said.

N107.2 billion for recurrent expenditure and N414.3 billion capital expenditure for the fiscal year of 2024. He said: “We have taken the view that one of the surest ways of ensuring sustainable eradication of poverty is through the aggressive enhancement of our education and public health systems.

“After all, we know that education correlates all over the

globe with economic advancement and prosperity, while health on the other hand is critical for the optimisation of the human resources of any nation or sub-national entity.” ppA

The governor further said in line with the government's commitment to reinventing the education system in the state, “we are constructing 260 Smart

Model Basic Schools across the 260 wards in the state which will rank amongst the best in the country.

“The pilot Smart Model Basic School in Owo Community in Nkanu East Local Government Area is now ready for commissioning and similar schools will be replicated in all the 260 wards across the 17 council areas in the state.

# News

## Ebony community clears air on alleged attack on traders

**N**gbo Leaders Council in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State on Wednesday debunked the alleged attack on Agila traders by suspected erring youths at Okwo-ngbo market.

The group, in a statement signed by the President and Secretary-General, Mr. Okeh C. Okeh, Mr. Emmanuel Etu Odo, and Mr. Cyril Obazi, who is the chairman of the Ngbo/Agila Inter-community Peace and

Reconciliation Committee, and made available to newsmen in Abakaliki, said no Ngbo youths attacked Agila youths or traders at the market.

The leadership of the group, reacting to a recent publication alleging that Agila traders were beaten by youths at Okwo-ngbo, expressed bitterness and anger, adding that the publication is capable of causing another crisis between the two inter-state communities, Ngbo

and Agila.

Recall that Ngbo people in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State and Agila in Ado Local Government Area of Benue State have been engaged in a communal war for the past one hundred and two years, leading to the loss of hundreds of lives and properties worth billions of naira.

It was gathered that the leadership of the two communities, Ngboejogu and Agila, local and state gov-

ernments of the affected areas have resolved to drop their weapons of war and embrace peace and had signed a peace accord on November 18, 2023.

The statement reads in part: "Ngbo youths did not attack Agila youths in Okwo Ngbo Market; there was no disruption of the day's business activities in the market. "The two inter-state neighbours dropped their weapons of war and embraced peace totally on November 18, 2023. Since that day, Ngbo and Agila people have been visiting each other, selling and buying in the same market and sleeping over without fear of any attack or molestations.

Ngbo Leaders Council further noted that: "The report was baseless, unfounded, and deceitful. The Ngbo Leaders Council views this report seriously, considering the sensitivity of the issue falsely reported and the time it came.

"We call on the general public, especially our Agila neighbours, to discountenance the unfounded publication and go about their normal businesses, which include buying and selling in Okwo Ngbo Market," the group stated.



Governor Uzodimma with APC National Chairman, Alhaji Abdullahi Ganduje and other party leaders welcome Senator Patrick Ifeanyi Ubah from the YPP.

## Two Anambra communities move to avert boundary disputes

### ...Ask Govt to place permanent monument on Boundary Benchmarks

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

**T**wo communities, Enugwu-Agidi in Njikoka Council Area and Ukpo Community in Dunukofia Council Area of Anambra State have taken preventive steps aimed at securing everlasting boundary peace by asking the state government to place permanent monuments at the agreed boundaries between Enugwu-Agidi and Ukpo communities.

*News Echo* reports that both communities through their spokespersons during the meeting, affirmed that there is no rancor or misunderstanding of any sort between them, adding that they understand themselves and also inter-marry a lot.

Enugwu-Agidi and Ukpo communities made this declaration on Tuesday December 5th, 2023 at the Deputy Governor's Conference Room where they approached the state government to officially institute and gazette permanent boundary delineation between them.

The representatives of both communities were their Traditional Rulers,

President Generals and other selected respected Elders of their respective Communities.

In their separate speeches, The traditional Ruler of Ukpo Community, Igwe Robert Eze represented by Ideh N'ukpo Ichie Okwuchukwu Ezeaku maintained that Ukpo and Enugwu-Agidi community have been co-habiting peacefully - together without rancor for memorable decades, which he further affirmed, is one of the reasons both communities inter-marry themselves.

On his part, The traditional Ruler of Enugwu-Agidi, Igwe Mike Okeke-Uche followed similar path, affirming that Ukpo and Enugwu-Agidi have no boundaries misunderstanding but have decided to take some preventive steps to avert future boundary conflicts especially now there are palpable urban-rural development.

Responding, the state's Deputy Governor and Chairman, state Boundary committee, Dr. Onyeka chukwu Ibezim, commended the traditional rulers of both communities, their President Generals and other selected elders present at

the meeting, for being timely precautionary in their preventive approaches.

Dr. Ibezim narrated to audience of both communities, state government's intentional moves to resolve all boundary headaches across the 177 communities of the state which he hinted was to smoothen the dividends of Governor Soludo revolutions in governance, evenly across the state.

## Nigeria, Kuwait Sign Bilateral Aviation Agreement

**A**ccording to Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development Festus Keyamo, Nigeria and Kuwait have inked a bilateral air services agreement (BASA).

According to a statement from the minister's media assistant, Tunde Moshood, the agreement was formalised during the current COP28 in Dubai, demonstrating a commitment to promoting international cooperation in the field of aviation.

However, Moshood clarified that the agreement was signed in Saudi Arabia following approval by both

## Anambra residents in jubilation as EEDC restores electricity supply

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

**J**ubilation rocked some parts of Anambra as the Enugu Electricity Distribution Company PLC (EEDC) restored electricity supply following completion of the planned maintenance by the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN), at the GCM 132KV/33KV Station, which led to few days of power outage.

*News Echo* reports that some residents in Awka, Nawfia-Abagana area, Amawbia, Enugu - Agidi-Awkuzu area and Somerford of the Awka north's expressed happiness over the power supply.

Confirming the report, Head, Corporate Communications, EEDC, Mr. Emeke Ezech, in a press release on Wednesday, 6th, 2023 said "The Enugu Electricity Distribution Company PLC (EEDC), wishes to inform her esteemed customers in Anambra State of the res-

toration of supply yesterday evening, following completion of the planned maintenance by the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN), at the GCM 132KV/33KV Station, which led to few days of power outage".

"Currently, all affected 33KV feeders are in service, and electricity supply has been restored to customers".

"It will be recalled that over the weekend, EEDC notified her customers in Anambra State of a planned outage to enable the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) engineers to carry out maintenance on their facility, an exercise that resulted in the shutting down of the 60MVA power transformer at the GCM station".

"We appreciate our esteemed customers for their patience and understanding during the period of the outage.

We assure our customers of our continued commitment to providing them with quality service".

## Protesters call on President Tinubu to sack FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike

**A** coalition of over 10,000 indigenes of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and civil society groups on Wednesday converged on the National Assembly on Wednesday, demanding for the resignation of FCT minister Nyesom Wike.

The protest, organized by the Network of Civil Societies for Economic Sustainability, cited Wike's alleged incompetence and lack of vision for the capital city as the primary reasons for their demand.

The crowd, described as the largest in the history of FCT protests, carried placards and banners expressing their dissatisfaction with Wike's leadership.

Addressing the gathering, the group's convener, Adamu Kabir Matazu, characterised the former Rivers State governor as callous, indecorous, uncouth, greedy, and selfish.

Matazu stated their concerns about the direction of the FCT under Wike's administration, claiming that his actions have not only undermined President Tinubu's agenda but also cast doubt on the credibility of the federal government.

"We are here today to demand the immediate resignation or sack of Nyesom Wike as Minister of the FCT due to his deficiency in character required for his office and in a government

that promises to renew the hope of Nigerians," he stated.

The convener accused Wike of being a difficult person for the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and urged the Federal Government to remove him from office.

The protesters expressed dissatisfaction with Wike's alleged land grabbing, cronyism, and high-handedness in land policies, which they claim reek of corruption.

The clash between Wike and the governor of Rivers State was cited as an example of the minister's involvement in dirty politics. Matazu stated: "It is in the best interest of our nation that Mr Wike's disruptive tendencies are addressed promptly to safeguard the integrity of this administration and ensure that the objectives set for the FCT are pursued diligently and without distractions."

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## Editorial

# Worries over Exodus of International Oil Service Providers

The Indigenous oil and gas producers under the aegis of Independent Petroleum Producers Group (IPPG) have raised the alarm over the gradual exit of many leading international oil service companies from Nigeria due to the "strict" local content requirements in the nation's upstream petroleum sector.

IPPG also asserted that the multiplication of local content levies such as the one per cent of total project costs paid by participants as Nigerian Content Development (NCD) levy and another three per cent charged for projects above \$1million cost for conduct of local content training have significantly increased the overall cost of projects delivery in the country.

The Chairman of IPPG and Group Chief Executive Officer of Waltersmith Group, Mr. Abdulrazaq Isa, made the assertions, on Tuesday in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, while delivering his goodwill message at the ongoing of the 12th Practical Nigerian Content (PNC) Forum, where he equally called for the review of local content policies to shore up in-country investments and enhance Nigeria's competitiveness.

At the event theme: "Deepening Nigerian Content Amidst Divestments, Domestication and Decarbonisation," Isa, whose speech was titled: "Nigerian Local Content in Action," harped on the need to ensure that the country's local content policies were constantly evaluated to make them continually fit-for-purpose and not counter-productive to long-term industry growth and cost targets.

He pointed out that the Nigerian oil and gas industry continued to face growing pressures to remain profitable and cost-efficient as it faced competition from other investment destinations.

He urged the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB) to review certain aspects of the local content legislation that might potentially work against the competitiveness of Nigeria's oil and gas sector in the global marketplace.

For instance, Isa complained of the human capital development training requirements wherein industry participants were required to set aside three per cent of project cost for projects above \$1million to conduct local content training. He stated, "While this is undoubtedly a laudable initiative, we must consider that it amounts to a multiplication of levies as industry participants are already equally required to contribute a separate one per cent of total costs as NCD levy.

"This invariably leads to higher project costs especially as the training is not allowed to be provided directly to company staff and service providers.

"Due to this and other contractual or administrative reasons, the process of complying with local content requirements has on many occasions proven to significantly increase the overall cost of delivering projects in Nigeria. "Again, this unintended outcome requires some detailed review in order to ensure that we are not losing new investments to emerging investment destinations in the process of driving our local content agenda. "Most critically, because of the strict local content requirements, we have gradually seen a reduction in the presence of leading international oil and gas service providers, many of whom are leaving Nigeria in droves." The IPPG Chair maintained that while Nigeria continued to prioritise local content development, it must recognise that international players have a key role to play in ensuring technology transfer and knowledge sharing that the local players could benefit from.

According to him, "You will agree with me that our local players still lack the requisite skills to adequately support our deep offshore operations and other specialised operations. Therefore, our recommendation is that ways should be sought to modify local content requirements to ensure that the industry remains globally competitive and sustainable." However, from the theme of this year's PNC conference, Isa observed that a lot was happening in the oil and gas industry globally, noting that the industry was witnessing a transformational shift and thus continues to underscore the importance of repositioning Nigeria's petroleum industry in the short to medium term. He pointed out that the ongoing global energy transition, the widespread reforms across the domestic landscape, notably the implementation of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA), the ongoing divestment of onshore and shallow water assets by the international oil companies (IOCs) and the Decade of Gas Initiative meant that exciting times were on the horizon for the

industry as it was bringing with it immense opportunities for growth.

He said Nigerian oil and gas industry players must remain focused on rapidly and efficiently exploiting their vast hydrocarbon assets for the socio-economic transformation of the nation.

"It is therefore imperative for the industry to be efficient and look inwards in fully optimising these hydrocarbon assets for today and future generations. The faithful implementation of the NOGICD Act is capable of unlocking the nation's economic potential and serving as an enabler for rapid industrialisation.

"The acceleration of in-country capacity utilisation, reduction of capital flight and in-country retention of a significant portion of industry spend will no doubt continue to expand the participation of the indigenous companies across the industry value chain and create linkages to the wider economy", Isa stated.

He disclosed that the 5000 barrels per day Waltersmith Refinery located in Ibigwe, Imo State, has delivered its first dividend payment to NCDMB, paid off a significant portion of its project financing and commenced an expansion phase designed to double the refinery's capacity to 10,000bpd in the next 18 months.

He added that the NCDMB's commercial ventures partnership programme continues to stimulate investment and promote in-country capacity.

The IPPG boss admitted that the government's effort in deepening local content in the Nigerian oil and gas industry was paying dividends.

He added that it was imperative that such effort be sustained with greater focus placed on bridging inherent capacity gaps; addressing infrastructural inadequacy and capital deficiency plaguing the industry at the moment in order to optimally derive the full benefits of the local content policy.

Meanwhile, The Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC) on Wednesday, announced that it had signed two major agreements to deliver Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to the domestic and international gas markets. The national oil company in a statement signed by its Chief Corporate Communications Officer, Olufemi Soneye, said the move aligned with its efforts to further boost natural gas utilization in the country and enhance Nigeria's gas revenue.

During two separate signing ceremonies held on the sidelines of the ongoing United Nation's Climate Change Conference (COP28), the NNPC said one of the agreements was with Wison Heavy Industry Co. Ltd, a Chinese company, for the development of a floating LNG project in Nigeria, targeting the international LNG market. Also, NNPC Prime LNG Ltd, an arm of NNPC Trading Ltd, signed a Supply, Installation and Commissioning Agreement with SDP Services, an independent oil and gas company, for a 421 tonnes per day LNG project, targeting the domestic LNG market.

The Floating LNG Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the Executive Vice President, Gas, Power & New Energy, Olalekan Ogunbayo on behalf of NNPC Ltd while the Managing Director of Wison Ltd, Mr. Kai Xu, signed on behalf of his company.

Both parties, the statement said, agreed to work together to chart a roadmap for the project development that will lead to an investment decision.

Similarly, the Small-Scale LNG (SSLNG) project agreement, it said, was signed by the Managing Director, NNPC Trading Ltd., Mr. Lawal Sade, on behalf of NNPC Prime LNG Ltd while Mr. Abhinav Modi, Managing Director of SDP Services Ltd, signed on behalf of his company. The SSLNG project, which will be located at Ajaokuta in Kogi State, Central Nigeria, it noted, will ensure the efficient supply of LNG to the Autogas/Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and industrial/commercial customers nationwide. The LNG project is expected to be operational by December 2024. Speaking shortly after the signing ceremony, the EVP Gas, Power & New Energy, Ogunleye, said the company was committed to delivering gas to industries nationwide and accelerating the NNPC's gas commercialization efforts through the floating LNG project.

Expressing their delight at signing the agreements, the partners pledged to work with the NNPC to deliver the projects within schedule and in the most cost-effective manner.

We therefore apply for conscientious, dutiful and responsible operations in the nation's Oil activity.

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## Opinion

# Is the National Cake Worth Eating?

By Matthew Ma (Cont'd Pg. 9)

Our national cake, which we are all entitled to, is good roads, quality education for our children, a supportive environment for entrepreneurs, job creation, and reliable electricity. These are the pillars of a thriving society. If we indulge in consuming a portion of the national cake for our own selfish reasons, we forfeit our right to the main cake when it's ready to be shared. Therefore, before you bite that national cake, ask yourself: is it worth a moment of pleasure and a lifetime of suffering?"

Nigeria faces a multitude of complex challenges. On the one hand, there is a pervasive sense of insecurity due to incidents of kidnapping for ransom, farmers and herder's insurgency, armed robbery, and other organized crimes. On the other hand, there is a sluggish pace of economic development, an alarming rate of unemployment, and a distressing level of poverty and deprivation. However, at the heart of these issues lies the pervasive and destructive force of corruption, which has plagued the country for decades. Unfortunately, it is believed that this scourge is perpetuated by a particular mindset among Nigerians, commonly referred to as the "national cake" mentality. The title "Is the National Cake Worth Eating?" is a thought-provoking statement that raises questions about the drawbacks of our national resources. A "national cake" mentality is the cancer that continues to turn our politicians into members of questionable character. In the 36 states of Nigeria (including Abuja), we see men and women who are scandalously known as Legislators but legislate mainly on how best to distribute the most significant portions of our cake to themselves. It baffles me to find a fertile ground that propels the greed that our State Legislators exhibit. I am shocked to see legislators across the 36 states strategize how best to eat our "national cake." To say that this is evil would be reducing an obnoxious scenario to the level of comedy. It is pure wickedness for the legislators to be feeding fat while the people they claim to serve collapse and die of hunger, malnutrition, and numerous preventable diseases.

So, what is this so-called national cake? While the phrase literally refers to a cake that represents a nation, in Nigeria, it is commonly used to describe the country's national wealth. The concept was introduced in the early 1960s to emphasize that the wealth of the nation belongs to all Nigerians and not just a select few. The idea behind the national cake is that every citizen should have access to the country's wealth, which is primarily derived from crude oil sales and exports. However, the original philosophical meaning behind the concept has been lost and distorted in our country, and it is now commonly associated with a privileged few against the vast majority of the populace. This raises important questions about whether the national cake is worth eating. Those who remember the Gowon



President Tinubu

era are likely familiar with the famous statement, "The problem with the nation is not money, but how to spend it." In 1973, during his tenure as head of state, Gen Yakubu Gowon made a statement about Nigeria's abundance of oil money. At first glance, the comment may seem naive or reckless, but upon closer examination, it becomes clear that it was true then and remains true today. Nigeria has always had a supply of money since the discovery of oil. The issue lies in how the money is spent or squandered, as some would argue. For example, the amount of money spent on running Nigeria's democracy is staggering. Billions of Naira are allocated each month to local governments, senatorial districts, and states, with little to show for it. If even half of this money were spent wisely, Nigeria would be in a much better position today. However, due to widespread corruption and incompetence, the country is where it is. So, what is the solution? One possible answer is to examine the differences between Nigerian and Western democracies, using the US as a case study.

First, in the United States and other Western countries, elections are primarily funded by public donations from individuals and organizations who support a candidate's campaign. This means that even wealthy candidates, like Donald Trump, rely on the financial support of their party and donors. However, in Nigeria, elections are typically funded by aspirants or by wealthy "godfathers." If a candidate wins, their primary responsibility may be to recover the funds spent on their campaign, often referred to as the "national cake." Second, it is a well-known fact that in the United States, politicians tend to accumulate wealth after leaving office rather than during their tenure. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that while in office, many companies seek their assistance in securing contracts or passing laws. However, once they leave office, these same companies often offer them full-time positions or consulting roles,

allowing them to continue to leverage their connections within the government. As a result, it is not uncommon to find retired or defeated politicians serving on the boards of various US companies. Third, the governing process in the United States is designed to be efficient and effective by breaking it down into smaller, more manageable components. For instance, if you encounter a pothole on your street, you wouldn't need to contact your state governor or Senator. Instead, you could reach out to your Mayor or council chairman, who is equipped to handle such matters promptly. This is in sharp contrast to Nigeria, where many people do not know who their council chairman is, and even if they know, it may lead to insignificant outcomes. Today, the current state of salary arrears in 23 out of 36 Nigerian states raises questions about the validity of the Gowon statement and the availability of easy money for many Nigerians. Since the discovery of oil in Bayelsa in 1956, the Nigerian governance discourse has been dominated by the concept of "sharing" the "national cake." This has led to a fundamental change in the mindset of many Nigerians, reducing the Nigerian dream to the simplistic struggle of trying to get a

"bite" of this "national cake." Currently, Nigeria's abundant natural resources are not being utilized for the benefit of the country as a whole. Instead, individuals are taking advantage of them to accumulate wealth for themselves. Experts have pointed out that the country's leaders are driven by greed and have manipulated the government to serve their own interests. Policies are often fraudulent, and regulations are used to extract bribes. Despite numerous cases of corruption and embezzlement, many offenders have escaped punishment. This culture of impunity and evasion is pervasive in Nigeria.

The "national cake" mentality has become synonymous with the opportunity to join the ranks of the country's elite, including politicians and businesspeople, and gain access to wealth quickly. Unfortunately, this culture has given rise to the practice of "bring your own people on board," which perpetuates institutionalized nepotism, where opportunities are shared only with those closest to you. This cake represents the ease of access to wealth that should be available to all but is limited to a select few. Originally intended to leverage the country's oil wealth for the benefit of the elites, it has now expanded to include all opportunities, from public funds to government contracts and appointments. Any chance to access funds with little accountability but unlimited financial opportunities is part of the national cake. Our economic model is built around the idea of high reward and minimal effort as long as you are in the right place at the right time. Instead of working together to create a better national cake, we are focused on securing our own piece. The "chop make I chop" mindset has unfortunately become the norm in our governance. People prioritize their immediate needs over the greater good, saying "If I don't bite now, when will I?" Our political leaders often offer us a small portion while keeping the more significant amount for themselves. We must reject this false generosity and demand a fair distribution of resources for all. We must remember that problems persist even after we have eaten our share

**“ So, what is this so-called national cake? While the phrase literally refers to a cake that represents a nation, in Nigeria, it is commonly used to describe the country's national wealth. The concept was introduced in the early 1960s to emphasize that the wealth of the nation belongs to all Nigerians and not just a select few. The idea behind the national cake is that every citizen should have access to the country's wealth, which is primarily derived from crude oil sales and exports. ”**

# News

## Imo PDP: Engr Ugwu remains Chairman - Legal Adviser

The Legal Adviser to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Imo State, Barr Kissing-er Ikoku, has insisted that Engr. Charles Ugwu firmly remains the Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Imo State.

He described it as an unfounded attempt by certain

party officials to remove Ugwu from his role. Recall that controversy erupted recently when Ugwu was purportedly ousted for "gross misconduct," as indicated in a document signed by Mr Njaka Duruiheoma, the Assistant State Secretary (Orlu Zone) of the PDP. The Legal Adviser dis-

missed the claims, emphasizing Ugwu's continued status as the State Chairman, supported by the majority of members in the State Working Committee (SWC) and State Executive Committee (SEC).

In a statement made available to newsmen in Owerri on Wednesday, Barr. Iko-

ku admonished the party members to remain steadfast and committed despite the turbulence caused by the actions of a few individuals aiming to destabilize the party in Imo State.

He assured that the state leadership would address the perceived acts of indiscipline by the erring officers in due course. The legal adviser underscored that the party would not be swayed by the activities of a handful of misguided individuals.

He cited the Constitution of the PDP, 2017, as amended, which outlines proce-

dures for the discipline and removal of elected officers at any level. Ikoku asserted that the Constitution does not grant the authority for a select few to gather and draft a document claiming to be a "resolution" for a vote of no confidence or suspension of an elected official, especially a State Chairman validly elected by a State Congress, the highest organ of the party at the state level.

"For the avoidance of doubt," Ikoku pointed out, "Article 47 (3) of the Constitution of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, as amend-

ed, empowers only the State Congress to take a 'Vote of Confidence' for the removal of a State Officer of the party."

He expressed dismay at the apparent lack of understanding among party officers at the state and local government area levels while emphasising the need for adherence to the constitutional provisions.

He said, "The statement conveyed a strong stance against what is perceived as an unlawful attempt to undermine the democratic processes within the PDP structure."



Stakeholders of Enugwu-Agidi in Njikoka Council Area and Ukpo Community in Dunukofia Council Area of Anambra State with the Deputy Governor of Anambra, Dr Ibezim shortly after the meeting at the Government House, Awka.

## Ifeanyi Ubah/Ekwunife APC alliance against masses interest

The National Coordinator of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) Media Warriors Forum, Evang. Chinedu Obigwe has portrayed the new claimed partnership between Ifeanyi Ubah and Uche Ekwunife for the Anambra State 2025 governorship and agent governorship race separately on the foundation of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as self serving and not in that frame of mind of masses of Anambra State. Obigwe in a statement described the alliance as a pure business venture where the actors are after their pockets and also seeking for political survival.

"Both of them have reached their political end

point and they are now fighting a battle of political survival. Ifeanyi Ubah knows very well that for him to return to the Senate for 3rd term can be likened to a camel passing through the eye of a needle hence his reason for defecting to APC as the ruling party at the Federal level.

"Well, they can lie and deceive Abuja based politicians but when they return to Anambra, the good people of the State will confine them to where they rightly belong. We know their antecedents and will not make the costly mistake of entrusting the future of five million ndi Anambra in their hands".

"The 2025 governorship election is still far but they started the campaign early

to deceive APC Governors, Ministers and other appointees of APC at the Federal level. They are boasting to APC leadership in Abuja that they have the capacity to whittle down Peter Obi's political influence and take over the State from Governor Soludo in 2025".

"The only thing they can get from their political alliance is money and contracts from APC led Federal government but as for Anambra governorship position, it is a no go area for them as long as Anambra electorates are concerned. Ifeanyi Ubah and Uche Ekwunife are only scheming to corner the huge donations from APC Governors in the guise of contesting the 2025 governorship election and nothing more".

"With ifeanyi Ubah and Uche Ekwunife joining the 2025 governorship election on APC platform, I say it boldly that both of them will be defeated by Governor Soludo because they are not match for him. I can close my eyes to predict the outcome of the result of the 2025 governorship election and I have no doubt in my mind that APGA will take a well deserved 1st position in that election.

"As I predicted earlier, their alliance will not last, they will scatter in different ways immediately after their shameful defeat in the 2025 governorship election. APGA faithful are not perturbed because the two of them are familiar political foes."

## Mbieri Community Celebrates Iriji Ohanaeze in style as Nlemigbo, Mayor, Akuchie bag awards

The people of Mbieri Nwaotuoke Autonomous Community in Mbaitolu Local Government Area of Imo state have celebrated its annual Iriji Oha na Eze Mbieri in grand style.

The Yam festival which is an age long event was a moment of peace and unity where the 28 communities in Mbieri Clan converged for the New Yam festival. Speaking at the event, an illustrious son of the community and the Former APC State Chairman, Chief Marcilnus Nlemigbo, said it's an opportunity to thank God for a successful farming year.

The APC chieftain who also bagged an award at the festival urged the people of Mbieri to work together in unity as it brings the suc-

cess of a people. Also speaking the President General of Mbieri Nwaotuoke and the PG of Ohanaeze Mbieri Chief Fidelix Akuchie who has served the community for four years said the Iriji is an avenue of recounting the success recorded by the clan in the past and make plans for the subsequent years.

He disclosed that the turnout of people at the event is a symbol of unity and togetherness. He however called on the people of Mbieri to embrace peace for the progress and development of the community.

The PG who was also given an award for his numerous contributions to the community expressed joy over the recognition given to him and promised to do more.

Also speaking Lady Mar-

gret Oparaugo, the president general of Mbieri women also expressed joy over the peaceful conduct of the festival and called on the women to support the development of the area.

Speaking to Newsmen, Chief Sir Onyewuchi Asinobi (Mayor) a philanthropist and one of the Apex leaders in the community expressed joy over a peaceful Celebration and thanked the people for an Award given him.

The chairman of the planning community also expressed delight over the success of the festival and sued for peace amongst the people of Mbieri ancient kingdom and called for all hands to be on deck to develop Mbieri. The event featured lots of cultural activities to the delight of sons and daughters of the community.

## Ebonyi govt set to build 512 kilometers of roads

The Ebonyi State Government is to commence construction of about 512kms of road across the State during the 2024 fiscal year. Governor Francis Nwifuru announced this during a Citizens' engagement organized to elicit the thoughts of Ebonyians for inclusion in the 2024 Budget Estimate of the State.

Governor Nwifuru who spoke on his administration's preparedness to open rural Communities through aggressive road construction in the upcoming year, clarified that out of the 512kms of roads earmarked for construction, a total of 310kms would be completed within the cycle of the 2024 Budget.

"I am very impressed listening to the Honorable Commissioner for Finance analyzing the Budget Estimate for 2024, it is an estimate, and it became very necessary that we lay it to Ebonyi people to criticize and make their inputs.

"We need to be very open to the people of the State and to get Ebonyi people involved

in what we think we can do to better their lives. "In the area of Works, we have marshalled out and identified so many roads that need urgent attention of the Government of the State, some are rural roads, some are urban roads, and some are Federal roads.

"In Ebonyi North, we have Nwiboko Obodo road, 12 km, Okwo Ngbo NigerCem road; Mgbaji Nwagu-Iziogo road already awarded; Kprikiri-Randa-Nwofe road. Some sections of the road as far as I am concerned in a very deplorable condition and we will give it a facelift. According to the Governor, in Ebonyi Central, Ezillo-Iyionu-Ezzaegu 23.8km contract has already been awarded. Contractors are already on site, at 13.34km Oriuzor road, among others.

The Governor disclosed that road constructions are ongoing in all the Local Government Areas of the state. "As it stands today, the Ministry of Works has the highest chunk of the Budget to the tune of over 21 billion

naira." Governor Nwifuru while noting that Health would get second highest attention under the 2024 Budget, said that becomes necessary to create access to health care services to the average Ebonyians in line with his People's Charter of Needs blueprint.

"We have recruited 36 new Doctors added to 7 of them previously bringing the total of them to 42. What the State will do is to pay them salary equivalent to what the Federal Government pays Doctors, buy them brand new Jeeps, furnish the Doctors Quarters in the General Hospitals, and make the Quarter habitable.

"As we speak, a Contract of N8.81 billion already awarded for the supply of Drugs, consumables, and equipment in the General Hospitals so that you don't have any need to come to town or even Abuja in search of medical attention."

The Governor also hinted of his administration's desire to scale up empowerment for underprivileged Ebonyians under the 2024 Budget.

## PDP NWC Dismisses Alleged Suspension of Imo State Chairman, Engr. Charles Ugwu

The National Working Committee (NWC) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has declared the kangaroo suspension of the Imo State Chairman of the party as illegal, null and void. The decision was taking at the attention of the National Working Committee (NWC) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has been drawn to the purported suspension of the Chairman of the Imo State Chapter of our Party, Engr. Charles Ugwu.

The decision was taken at its 579th National Working Committee (NWC) meeting

on Wednesday, December 6, 2023 were it was the suspension was declared as null and void and of no effect, not being consistent with laid down Rules and the provisions of the Constitution of the PDP (as amended in 2017)

The NWC therefore charges all leaders, critical stakeholders, members and teeming supporters of our Party in Imo State to be guided accordingly.

The NWC enjoins all Party members in Imo State to remain united and continue to work together in the overall interest of our Party.

# News

## Uzodimma not in control of LGA allocations - ALGON Chairman

### ...Says SOLADs use funds appropriately

By Ikenna Orioha

The Sole Administrator of Oru West and Chairman, Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON), Imo State Chapter, Hon. Admin.

Willie TC Okolieogwo, has stated that the local government funds are being managed by Sole Administrators who he said appropriate the funds judiciously.

He noted that the allocations which come directly from the federal government into the coffers of the local government councils are

not controlled by Governor Hope Uzodimma, but by the Council Chairmen who he praised for appropriating the allocations effectively on social development such as roads, maintenance of public structures, healthcare centres, payment of salaries to LGA workers and their welfare.

Okolieogwo stated this in a Post Election Media Chat held at ALGON Office Owerri, on Friday. He reflected that due to the love the Governor has for the state, he was able to rehabilitate the healthcare centres in each

ward in the 27 local government areas of Imo State, gave marching order that 5km of road be constructed in the 27 local government areas with local/indigenous contractors handling the projects (aimed at promoting local contents), informing that most of the roads that lead to the LGA headquarters are fixed, hailing Sole Administrators for utilizing the LGA allocations accordingly.

The Oru West SOLAD pointed out that Federal Allocation Account Committee (FAAC) monthly briefing goes on in the state, but it is

not made public, saying details of the meeting is always in public domain, assuring that rehabilitation of roads in bad shape would be done especially during the festive period to ease movement.

He remarked that the Governor is also making inroads in agriculture, little wonder he distributed over 900 bags of fertilizer to Imo farmers free of charge to encourage sufficiency food production and food security in the state, mentioning that species of seedlings are going to be given to farmers in due course.

Okolieogwo hinted that the Governor has really achieved greatness in terms of leadership performance particularly in road/bridge construction and building of quality modern hospitals, youth empowerment and regular payment of salaries and pensions to workers and pensioners in the state, appreciating the Governor for bringing Imo people together, as well as reducing insecurity.

He maintained that the sterling performance and goodness of the Governor endeared him to the people who he thanked for given him a second mandate at Imo Douglas House.

is giving this all-important sector the deserved attention. "As the governor rightly pointed out in his budget speech, education is one of the surest ways of ensuring sustainable eradication of poverty. By implication, this budget is for the benefit of our children, the teachers and the entire society.

"So, on behalf of the entire teachers of Enugu State, I say a big 'thank you' to the governor for his great vision for education in the state."

## Nigeria's economy may have lost about \$335 million (N310bn) in Foreign Direct Investments, FDI

Against the backdrop of more exits from ground operations in Nigeria by more multinational companies, Nigeria's economy is expected to lose \$335 million (about N310bn) in Foreign Direct Investments, FDI. The amount represents the combined assets value of the two latest exit announcements by Procter & Gamble, P&G, a major global player in the Fast Moving Consumer Goods, FMCG, segment and Equinor, another global player in the upstream oil sector. Procter & Gamble (P&G), an American multinational consumer goods, says it has plans to transition from local production to solely importing its products as the firm winds down its on-ground presence in Nigeria. Equinor is exiting after selling its Nigerian business, including its share in the Agbami oil field to Nigerian-owned energy company Chappal Energies. Explaining the decision, Andre Schulten, chief financial officer, P&G, said the decision is a result of "the challenging business environment in Nigeria, as well as the difficulty in creating US dollar value." On his part, Equinor's Senior Vice President for Africa Operations, Nina Koch, in a statement, said: "Nigeria has been an important part of Equinor's international portfolio over the past 30 years. This transaction realises value and is in line with Equinor's strategy to optimize its international oil and gas portfolio and focus on core areas." In the second half of this year two other major multinational companies, GlaxoSmithKline, GSK, Consumer Nigeria Plc and Sanofi-Aventis Nigeria Limited, a French pharmaceutical company, pulled out assets estimated at over \$800 million from Nigeria, citing harsh operating environment.



Imo APC LGA Party Secretaries pledge unwavering support to Uzodimma's administration in visit to State Party Chairman, McDonald Eberé.

## Teachers, economists laud Mbah's attention on education, infrastructure

Teachers in Enugu State, under the auspices of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), have hailed Governor Peter Mbah for allocating a whopping 33 per cent of the total 2024 budget sum to the education sector.

Civil society groups and economists have also lauded the governor for approving people-focused infrastructural projects and programmes capable of turning the fortunes of the state around. Mbah had on Tuesday laid a N521.5billion 2024 Appropriation Bill at the House of Assembly.

The budget tagged: "Budget of Disruptive Economic Growth", comprises N414.3billion Capital Expenditure, representing about 79 per cent of the budget and N107.2billion Recurrent Expenditure, representing about 21 per cent of the budget.

Whereas the economic sector and infrastructure came tops on sectorial allocation basis with N207.8billion and N182.9billion in the Capital Expenditure distribution, education got 73.6 per cent of the social sector provision, and 33 per cent of

the entire budget. Reacting to the budget estimates, Chairman of the Enugu State Wing of the NUT, Comrade Theophilus Odo, said: "The governor has shown in every way that he has great interest in education.

"Honestly, when he said during the last convocation

at Enugu State University of Technology (ESUT) that education would get over 30 per cent of the budget, we hardly believed him because it had never been like that anywhere in Nigeria, including at the federal level. But with this, we are very happy and relieved that a leader

## Abductors of Imo Catholic Priest, driver reduce ransom from N50m to N10m

The gunmen who kidnapped an Imo Catholic priest, Rev. Fr. Kingsley Eze, and his driver, Uchenna Newman, have demanded N10 million to release the hostages.

It was gathered that the kidnappers had earlier demanded N50 million to free the priest and the driver. Fr. Eze is the parish priest of St. Michael's Catholic Church, Umuekebi, Osuwerre, Isiala Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State. Recall that gunmen abducted the priest and his driver on Thursday night near Oriema Junction.

They also shot an onlooker, who was taken to an unidentified hospital. A pa-

rishioner, who did not want to be identified, told news men on Wednesday that the kidnappers had reduced the N50 million demand to N10 million.

He revealed that the kidnappers contacted the driver's wife on Sunday and Monday and demanded N50 million. According to the parishioner, the kidnappers got in touch again on Wednesday and dropped the ransom to N10 million.

The source said, "They called the driver's wife on Sunday and Monday and made a demand of N50 million. But I learned that they have called again and reduced the amount to N10 million."

## Army launches 'Operation Golden Dawn 3' in Abia

The Nigerian Army on Wednesday launched a military exercise dubbed 'Operation Golden Dawn III' to address security concerns in Abia State.

Governor Alex Otti launched the exercise at the 14 Brigade Step-Up Headquarters, Isuochi, in Umunneochi Local Government Area of the state. Otti, represented by Mr Macdonald Uba, his Special Assistant on Security, expressed confidence that the exercise would assist in flushing out criminal elements in the nooks and crannies of the state.

He further stated that it will provide additional encouragement to the

military and other security services to further reduce crime and criminality throughout the state during the Yuletide season. The governor advised officers and men taking part in the exercise to follow the Rules of Engagement and Code of Conduct.

According to him, "This is to avoid any action that may infringe on the rights of the citizens and the host community."

"May I assure the Nigerian Army and other security agencies in Abia of our continued support within available resources, to enable them to carry out their constitutional responsibilities."

In his welcome address,

ered, did not accept electronic transfers.

Most customers, who visited their banks to transact normal businesses, were disappointed, as they were only authorised to withdraw a maximum of N50,000. A customer with GTBank lamented that he had requested to withdraw N200,000, but was only advised to fill a form to withdraw N50,000.

He said: "I was at the GTB to withdraw today, but I was only authorised to withdraw N50,000. It was not enough. When I enquired why it was so, the cashier simply said that the CBN disbursed a lesser amount to them, unlike before. So, the only solution was to give customers according to what they had."

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# News

## Abia First Lady pledges action against SGBV, set up referral centres

The wife of Abia governor, Priscilla Otti has pledged to put up a workable action plan in collaboration with the state Ministry of Women Affairs to domesticate Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, SGBV policy trust of the Nigeria Governors' spouses forum by ensuring that gender-based violence becomes a thing of the past in Abia.

Mrs Otti stated this at the ongoing 4th annual conference of the Nigeria Governors' spouses forum, held at Abuja, to mark the 16 days of activism on sexual and gender-based violence, adding that she is now better informed and equipped on positive ways of eradicating sexual and gender-based violence in the society.

According to her, "the theme of the conference 'Youth Allies: Bridging Generations to End Violence' elicits interest not only to end gender-based violence but to empower women, create cancer awareness, provide shelter for women and the girl child, and set up referral centers where victims can seek redress and be rehabili-

tated".

The Governor's wife who revealed that part of her take home from the conference was the need to curb the menace in the state, noted that of particular interest to her is the introduction of a mobile court to try offenders and get justice for victims of sexual and gender-based violence and warn those fueling harmful practices that expose women and the girl child to violence to desist from the act henceforth.

She commended the chairman of the Nigeria Governors Forum, Gov. Abdulrahman Abdulrazak of Kwara state, for his immense support to the Nigeria Governors' Spouses Forum, especially in the area of establishing a mobile court.

In her address, the chairperson of the forum and first lady of Kwara state, Professor Olufolake Abdulrazak, said it was the time to engage youth allies in building generations to end gender-based violence.

Professor Olufolake explained that the Nigeria Governors' Spouses Forum has, in the last four years, actively

engaged in advocacies and plausible engagements, partnerships, and collaborations towards ensuring that Nigerian women and girls are positioned to harness their full potentials while leading sensitization and awareness to mitigate concerns on sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria.

"Owing to the spike in incidents of sexual and gender-based violence during the lockdown occasioned by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, we have amplified advocacies that led to the declaration of a state of emergency on gender-based violence.

"It has become imperative that young people have to be inculcated with these values hence the theme of the 2023 conference 'Youth Allies: Bridging Generations to End Violence' gives credence to our resolve to continue to deepen engagements, collab-

oration, and partnerships," she said.

Also in her speech, the Minister for Women Affairs, Hon. Uju Ohaneye, disclosed that a lot of money has been voted for advocacies in the past but now we are expediting action by instituting a mobile court to address these issues and putting an end to gender-based violence in the country.

At the interactive section, some of the panelists, Activist Onyeka Onwenu, Movie producer Mrs. Joke Silva, Dr. Saudatu Mahdi of women's rights advancement and protection alternative (WRAPA), and Dr. Kemi Da Silva Ibru, narrated their experiences and advocated for civil and moral reorientation of the youths at the earliest stage. They called on the Nigerian government to do more by eradicating sexual and gender-based violence in the country.

## TCN, Discos to complete 53 CBN-funded projects in May

The Central Bank of Nigeria, Transmission Company of Nigeria, and power distribution companies will in May next year complete a total of 53 power projects worth N122bn currently under construction across the country.

During a tour of three of the projects located at Ojo, Isolo and Oworonshoki Transmission stations in Lagos on Wednesday, TCN's Programme Coordinator in charge of the projects, Mathew Ajibade, said when completed, over 1,000 megawatts would be added to the firm's wheeling capacity.

"The projects are currently being implemented through the project management office at the TCN headquarters in collaboration with both TCN field engineers and the Discos technical team.

The time set for completion of the projects is May 2024 latest. PMO made progress with the implementation of the programme despite

challenges encountered and is committed to ensuring the successful implementation," he said. According to Ajibade, the projects have not been abandoned as is being widely speculated, adding that work is currently ongoing, and would be delivered at the expected time.

An Assistant Director/Head Infrastructure Finance Office, CBN, Tumba Tijani, explained that the apex bank had in August last year released the loan at a 9 per cent interest rate for the project.

"The CBN in continuation of its intervention in the power sector approved the sum of N122, 289, 344 for the programme Nigeria Electricity Market Stabilisation Facility-3 based on the projects estimated for the identified projects.

The facility aims to resolve the transmission/distribution interface bottlenecks to improve supply to end users and unlock the unutilised generation capacity in the country," he said.

He added that N85.43bn had so far been disbursed into the Advance Payment Guarantee account of the 53 contractors to execute the projects.

A document obtained by The PUNCH showed that the projects entailed delivery of eight 150MVA power transformers, 19 1000MVA transformers, 60MVA transformers, re-conductoring existing transmission lines (conductors & Accessories), upgrading of the existing 132/33KV substations, and construction of 33KV line bays.

## Okonjo-Iwela makes Forbes' 100 Most Powerful Women's list

The Director-General of the World Trade Organisation Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has been listed on Forbes' 100 Most Powerful Women list. According to Forbes' 20th annual ranking released on Tuesday, the Nigerian economist held the 87th spot, while South African businesswoman Mpumi Madisa, ranked 88th. Tanzanian President, Samia Has san, also made her debut on the list at the 93rd position, alongside Nigerian media mogul and philanthropist, Mo Abudu at the 98th.

The US Business magazine explained that the list was compiled using money, media, impact, and spheres of influence. Commenting on the development, Okonjo-Iweala wrote on X via

her official handle, "Feel truly honoured to be named one more time as one of the Forbes 100 Most Powerful Women in the World.

"This will be the 7th time, starting in 2011. Congratulations to all the women on this list, working hard to make a difference and, to others working hard to change the world even if they are not on the list.

"Special congratulations to my younger sister, Mo Abudu, great to have two Nigerian women on this list." Okonjo-Iweala is the seventh director-general of the WTO. She took office on 1 March 2021, becoming the first woman and the first African to serve as Director-General. Her term of office will expire on 31 August 2025.



Gov Nwifuru during budget presentation to the state Assembly in Abakaliki.

## Presidents-General killed for exposing drug dealers in Anambra Communities - ASATU

The crux of the matter at the general assembly cum end-of-year programme of the Anambra State Association of Town Unions (ASATU) held at the ASATU secretariat complex Government House Awka, was the incessant - grue some murder of the Presi-

dents-General who dared to expose drug dealers and other criminal activities in their respective communities.

The Presidents-General who recounted their ordeals in the hands of moneybags who provide cover for criminal elements in the communities, took turns to explain that the Nigeria Police is making matters worse by not guaranteeing source protection when intelligence is made available to them.

The PGs said they were tired of the police not protecting sources of information because when errand boys of drug dealers or drug dealers themselves were exposed and reported to the Police or when arrests were made before the PGs returned to their communities from the police station, the arrested suspects were already waiting for them at home to deal with them ruthlessly for daring to report them and their principals to the police.

Some of the PGs who

shared very harrowing -experiences in their respective communities said it was time the government guaranteed the security and protection of the Presidents-General in their efforts to rid the communities of bad elements unleashing terror and mayhem at the grassroots.

The ASATU general -assembly cum end-of-year get-together which Deputy Governor Dr. Onyekachukwu Ibezim was a special guest of honor, alongside other very important personalities including the Transition Committee Chairmen of Idemili-South, Anaocha and Anambra-East, who were conferred Eminent Personality Awards, was a veritable platform to further encourage the PGs not to despair but to be more intrepid in the fight against illicit drug dealers, consumers of illicit drugs and other related crimes.

Speaking on the occasion, the immediate past National President of ASATU Chief

Alex Onukwube, said Presidents-General should be applauded for their relentless fight against illicit drug abuse in the communities. Onukwube said the government has a lot to do to empower community leaders in the war against illicit drug dealers; and that they cannot win the war with bare hands.

He said some PGs have been killed in the fight against organized crimes and bad lives in the communities. He equally expressed concern that the government hasn't done anything about PGs who have been killed while fighting crimes in their respective communities.

He therefore noted that the PGs were ready to assist the government in ridding bad elements of communities but stressed the need also for the government to guarantee adequate protection for the PGs.

The government should help upgrade community vigilantes in terms of remunerations, training, and other logistics as he believes that local community vigilantes still operate in very crude ways.

## Ohaneze condemns accidental bombing of Kaduna village

The Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide has condemned the accidental bombing by the Nigerian Army that claimed the lives of about 85 villagers and injured several others at Tudun Biri village in the Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

It is indeed a paradox that at a time Nigerians are facing various challenges and losses of lives in the hands of bandits, kidnapers, Boko-Haram insurgents amongst others, an air mishap by the Nigerian Army will claim about 85

lives. The President General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide, Chief Engr. Dr. Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu expressed deep sorrow over the avoidable catastrophe.

The Igbo Leader urged President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to conduct a thorough investigation on the bomb mishap and those found to be negligent should face the full weight of the Law.

The Igbo Leader is optimistic that the outcome of the investigation will help the Nigerian Army to attain a more prudent, skillful, professional military-civilian

engagements in their operations. Iwuanyanwu calls for adequate compensation to the families who lost their loved ones in the incident as well as appropriate treatment to the victims of the airstrike who are in the hospitals.

On behalf of the National Executive Committee of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide and indeed the entire Igbo, we sympathize with the affected families, the government and the good people of Kaduna State for this very unfortunate tragedy.

## Opinion (Cont'd)

of the cake.

The distribution of national wealth in our country has unfortunately been concentrated among a few elites, even within political parties. It's no secret that many political parties engage in the practice of sharing money during rallies. The more money a party shares, the more members it attracts, leading to increased corruption within the political landscape. It's disheartening to see that many Nigerians align themselves with the Ruling Party not because of the competence and ingenuity of its leaders but because they hope to partake in the sharing of the national cake. It's important to note that this mentality is not limited to the ruling class; many other Nigerians are also guilty of it. As the saying goes, "If the head of a fish is spoiled, the body cannot escape the decay." For instance, in 2016, President Muhammadu Buhari's administration launched the National Social Investment Program (NSIP), a groundbreaking policy in Nigeria. The NSIP aimed to combat poverty and hunger, as it was reported that up to 62 percent (around 100 million) of Nigerians lived below the Western poverty line, surviving on less than \$1 per day. The NSIP consisted of four subsets: the National Home-Grown School Feeding (NHGSF), which provided locally grown food to primary school children; the General Enterprise and Empowerment Program (GEEP), a micro-lending initiative for traders, farmers, and women; N-Power, which trained young graduates and paid them a monthly stipend of N30,000 for two years; and Conditional Cash Transfers, which gave N5,000 monthly to the poorest of the poor. While these programs were generally successful, there were some instances of corruption and misinformation, such as vendors supplying substandard food and officials favoring their relatives for loans. In the COVID-19 era, even the relief supplies provided by the government and private donors were vandalized while government officials hoarded them. The supplies included food items such as rice, spaghetti, instant noodles, and garri, which were donated by the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development. The discovery of these supplies in large quantities led the people taking them away, claiming it was their "national cake."

The mindset of biting the 'national cake' continuous to bring numerous problems, particularly in relation to corruption and bribery. This idea has fueled the embezzlement of public funds and other related issues, leading to a dangerous hunger for power among Nigerian politicians. Unfortunately, the notion of a cake for all has been twisted to mean a cake for a select few, resulting in an intense desire among people to hold positions of power and leadership. This is primarily due to the fact that leadership positions in Nigeria often come with access to the country's resources and wealth. As a result, elections in Nigeria are marred by political assassinations, the influence of influential political figures, violence, kidnapping, bribery, and other forms of corruption. These challenges have made it difficult for Nigeria to establish a stable and fair

political system. In the political landscape, sharing is a prevalent aspect of governance, akin to the distribution of stomach infrastructure. It serves as a convenient means of easing tensions within the polity and among politicians. Whether it's the National Assembly divvying up principal positions or the Federal government providing fiscal bailouts to states, sharing is a recurring theme. For instance, there have been reports of discontent among stakeholders of the All-Progressive Congress (APC) in Benue regarding the N5 billion palliative provided by the federal government to alleviate the impact of fuel subsidy removal on impoverished citizens. Apparently, some members of the party are not happy with the manner the State governor is spending the N2 billion grant designated for the State from the promised N5 billion. As a result, a member of the National Assembly removed the governor's picture from his office, citing concerns over his lack of commitment to the welfare of the people. There is a growing concern among Benue indigenes that party stakeholders may pressure the governor to divert funds intended for development to private pockets.

In recent times, the national cake has become increasingly attainable for the ordinary person, resulting in a heated race for public funds that are then converted into personal gains. This trend has transcended the confines of oil wealth and has become deeply ingrained in the psyche of every Nigerian. Instead of striving to boost productivity, many people will dedicate themselves to acquiring skills solely to partake in the national cake and achieve success and wealth. Regrettably, the worth of hard work is frequently eclipsed by the appeal of swift and effortless riches. By taking a purposeful tour of Nigerian households, one can gain insight into where the idea of biting the national cake begins." For example, I entrusted a 10-year-old child with N1000 to purchase an item for me valued at N600, with the remaining amount to be kept as a token of gratitude. Despite being unable to locate the requested object, the child returned with a balance of N600. In Nigeria, the national cake begins right from the home. At home, it is widely believed that the nation's wealth should be shared, regardless of individual contributions. Unfortunately, this sharing formula has led to misplaced priorities and the emergence of the "eat once and suffer long" mentality, resulting in setbacks and deception. How can we understand a family who believes that the only way to partake in the benefits of society is through questionable means? How can we communicate to a parent who thinks that their child's wedding can only be successful through a political sponsorship? How can we help a capable young person who believes that everything should be given to them for free? How can we address the mindset of a graduate who feels that they must compromise their values in order to succeed in life? How can we explain to religious leaders that they do not need to flatter a human in order to receive blessings? Is it possible to eat one's cake and have it? This concept is impossible in

reality, as once a cake is consumed, it is no longer present.

The "national cake" approach has also had a detrimental impact on government operations at all levels. This term has created a perception among the general public that government positions are primarily a means of securing a portion of the country's resources rather than an opportunity to contribute to the nation's growth. As a result, politics has become one of the most lucrative professions in Nigeria. At times, when the government pledges to combat corruption but simultaneously glorifies it in both overt and covert ways, it displays a severe lack of understanding of what corruption truly entails. The national cake syndrome serves as the precursor to corruption in Nigeria, as it creates a hierarchy of Nigerians and facilitates the transfer of public funds into the hands of looters. The national cake is responsible for the emergence of regional and ethnic politics. This notion has led to some of the most absurd and wasteful investments in human history, such as drilling oil in Bayelsa and refining it abroad. The national cake stifles human innovation and hard work. It crushes merit-based excellence and fair competition, leaving the entire nation waiting for the return of the politician-benefactor to enjoy a good meal. The national cake is the reason why Nigerian workers refuse to work unless they are guaranteed their gains and why tribal origins are often considered superior over competence and merit. The national cake is also the reason why the presidency must come from a specific region of the country in the name of zoning, which serves as a soft landing for sectional consciousness. The national cake is the reason why the government, particularly the federal government, operates as a center for benefit-sharing, with no obligation to serve the citizens except to offer them crumbs from the table as benefits they have no right to demand.

The national cake has hindered the development of Nigeria's regions, regardless of their natural and human potential. This is because the Federal Government controls development through the distribution of the national cake. The national cake is seen as the only way to maintain Nigeria's unity and prevent any attempts to negotiate coexistence. It is evident that true democracy and progress in Nigeria will not occur until the older generations, who created the national cake mentality and used it to maintain themselves, release their hold on Nigerian politics. This mentality is the foundation of

corruption, which many in government either do not understand or cannot resist. However, Nigeria must inevitably move towards a brighter future. This will require a new beginning free from the national cake mindset. Therefore, in order to bake the national cake, let us come together like ingredients in a cake. The Hausa-Fulanis can bring the flour, the Yorubas can contribute the eggs, the Igbos can provide the butter, the Ijaws can offer the sugar, and the Efiks can get the baking powder. Let the Urhobos give the milk, and let the Biroms, the Tivs, Ibibios, Kanuri, Annag, Nupe, Igala, Kalabari, Manga, Badawai, Bade, Gade, Igede, Bokyi, Bjaham, Etsako, Agatu, Edo, Esan, Alago, Gbari and all the other tribes and ethnicities of the nation offer their unique ingredients and services for the baking and meet with each other at the kneading table before the baking. Only by working together and meeting at the kneading table can we bake a cake that represents our free choice and serves as a symbol of our fraternal coexistence. Therefore, the concept of the national cake carries great importance for the development of our country. The effects of this ideology should be vehemently rejected. It is imperative that we acknowledge the detrimental impact of national cake politics on Nigeria's political sphere and take measures to counteract it. This is the only way we can make genuine strides towards attaining actual progress and prosperity for every Nigerian.

Dear fellow Nigerians, it's time we shift our perspective on the national cake. The national cake is not the money we take from the treasury for personal gain, nor is it the N10,000 they pay us to spread false news. It's not the incentive they offer us to discredit and disrupt the programs of our opponents. The national cake is not the money they pay our daughters to compromise their dignity, nor is it the meager amount they pay us to hold up signs for or against others. It's different from the vast sums they pay our religious and traditional leaders to sing their praises. Our national cake, which we are all entitled to, is good roads, quality education for our children, a supportive environment for entrepreneurs, job creation, and reliable electricity. These are the pillars of a thriving society. If we indulge in consuming a portion of the national cake for our own selfish reasons, we forfeit our right to the main cake when it's ready to be shared. Therefore, before you bite that national cake, ask yourself: is it worth a moment of pleasure and a lifetime of suffering?

***The mindset of biting the 'national cake' continuous to bring numerous problems, particularly in relation to corruption and bribery.***

***This idea has fueled the embezzlement of public funds and other related issues, leading to a dangerous hunger for power among Nigerian politicians. Unfortunately, the notion of a cake for all has been twisted to mean a cake for a select few, resulting in an intense desire among people to hold positions of power and leadership.***

## Commentary

# The economics of the 'Japa' phenomenon

By Tope Fasua

When I first started thinking about writing this article, my conclusion was that with the way young Nigerians are fleeing from the country – with the implication that almost 100 per cent of the time – the children they have will never return to Nigeria, the very crop of human beings that should trigger continuity especially in Nigeria's south, are gone forever. I mean, who is going to bring new development to our land? Who are the ones who will build the houses of the mid-21st century? Who will develop modern plans that will transform the face of our societies and seek to compete with what happens abroad? I was overawed with the feeling of despair. I know for a fact that perhaps only half of those who have left will come back to Nigeria actively. And perhaps less than 20 per cent will come back home eventually, develop roots here, build or buy houses to come and live in, and by every means, less than 1% of them will be able to convince the families they make abroad to come back here with them. This is because:

1. The systems created abroad are designed to make it incredibly hard for you to detach, no matter how much you desire to. When I opened a company in the UK and decided to leave after 8 years, it took more than two years of valiant efforts to be able to clear all sorts of obligations – some of which I never knew existed.

2. Let me be more specific. The credit culture and system is designed to suck you in. your life is run by government even as they pretend to be invisible. Unlike in Nigeria, you cannot easily wake up one day to depend on friends in high places to create something new. You must join the queue because 99.9% of the time, nobody that matters knows you, especially if you migrated – like most people – midway into your life and didn't grow up there. The tax system is also brutal and even the more you earn, the more they take from you and the more you dig yourself into that system. There are expectations. The more you earn, they bigger your house and all other obligations. There's nothing like leaving voluntarily. You must continue servicing the 'system'... oftentimes until you die.

3. The value of the currency is another very strong factor. Whereas as at our independence, the colonial leaders left our currencies at par with theirs (and so were able to buy our raw exports cheap – imagine taking all our cocoa, palm oil, and groundnut at sums that were not enough to expand our economy – today, our currency is a shadow of what it was). Nobody leaves a country with a strong currency for one with a weak currency or with future prospects of depreciation, except you have set up cashflows to continue working for you in the country with strong currency.

4. The illusion of strong currency usually blinds us to the phenomenon called Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). This PPP means that \$1 in America is basically nothing (a beggar may reject same from you), but in Nigeria, in the hands of a poor person, it goes very far. One white blogger recently demonstrated this in Lagos, when with \$1 he bought a meal of rice, beans and spaghetti with boiled egg, bought meat pie, a huge 'puff-puff', corn on the cob and a bottle of coke (all for about N950). Of course, you will not get such a deal in organized restaurants in Nigeria but we are talking about the really poor here. On the average what you need \$10 to buy in the USA, you probably need less than \$2 equivalent to buy here.

5. For as long as people don't consider the PPP factor, even if Nigeria continues to improve, perhaps our naira must be revalued and made stronger (for the psychological advantages) before our people abroad begin to consider moving back in significant percentages. Also, job opportunities that can help them maintain their standards of living must be available here. Only a very few of them will be able and willing to start up their own companies and make a success of it.

6. The fact is that the first age of 'japa' (the Andrew era), around 1984, was the beginning of the mass media and internet era. Images are powerful. And our young people started seeing images from abroad. Before then, all we could see were 'post cards' and pictures sent from abroad. The more Africans – especially Nigerians – started seeing what 'abroad' looks like, the more emigration accelerated. The more we disdained our country. We totally ignored the historicity of

economic and social development in itself. We wanted development and wanted it now! This new 'japa' age coincides with the AI – Artificial Intelligence – era, where communication has gone haywire, and we now have an overload of those enticing images that captivate the young and not-so-young. This coincides with even more frustration with our relatively slow pace of development, and indeed the fact that our development trajectory and journey is not within our control or imagination.

First, let's look at the upsides. For one, nobody can hold anybody down. Everybody wants personal improvement first. Only a few lucky people have sacrificed their lives for country and not lived and died to regret it. I've seen a few transformational pictures of people who left Nigeria looking very haggard only to turn out very fresh and apparently prosperous abroad. Perhaps if it was only for the nutrition they get – or perhaps some steady cashflow that guarantees food on the table – nobody can convince such people to stay back here for any reason. There are millions who struggle for survival daily in Nigeria and Africa whose lives get totally transformed abroad. Some are able to also run away from family problems and help from abroad after sorting themselves out. Japa is good because abroad, nobody cares who you are, what tribe you're from or anything of that sort. All you need is an opportunity to prove yourself, if you're a focused hardworker. And boom! You can take off. Certainly, it should not be made to sound easy. In many of the 'abroad' lands, you have to send out 2,000 job applications before you get lucky. You also may have to start with menial jobs that you would never touch at home. Many times, they want to pass you through the crucible – perhaps to remind you how difficult it was for their ancestors to build their lands. Japa is great because it organises many of our young folks. They learn as soon as they arrive abroad that the system is no respecter of persons. There are really no big men. Western nations have learnt over time that all these things that waste our times upon back home. Western economies – and of late those in the East like China – are robust enough to absorb most people and guarantee a certain level of comfort. Japa-ees (allow me to call them that) are also exposed to the joys of modern living. They see the best infrastructure that man has made so far, and the imaginative amongst them can only marvel at the achievements of these developed countries, sometimes getting very angry at why the same achievements have not been possible in their own countries. The wiser ones will be able to document these achievements with a view to replicating same at home someday. But in the end, japa as we call it (the propensity of young southern Nigerians to leave en masse for other societies and economies that have arrived), could lead to extinction of our land and culture and whatever we call 'civilizations' here if mishandled. The only way it has worked for other societies like the Chinese is that they learnt so much in the foreign nations, documented so much, and returned home to replicate. They were often accused of stealing intellectual property but they pressed on anyway. Today, their story has changed. Even Britain was once a japa nation. In the era of Pax Britannica when that small, rainy archipelago dominate the world, many Brits loved to travel and live in other lands and never returned. Some were attracted simply to the better weather elsewhere. Many were posted as colonial officers. Others were drifters, smugglers, farmers, businessmen, or clergy, some of whom settled in places like Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya or South Africa, to name a few.

What We Should Do

1. There's no point convincing the average young Nigerian not to leave.
2. We should see the emigration as an advantage and seize on it as appropriate.
3. We should plan to reap this in many ways.
4. We should cultivate those who are emigrating, first to ensure they feel positive about their country of origin.
5. We should educate them about the economics of their action and the implication of 'japa'.
6. Things like PPP and the tax/credit systems abroad should be thoroughly analyzed for them. Also the economic struggles Nigeria is going through having to source many billions of

dollars to fund the needs of emigrants.

7. Our diaspora commission should go into overdrive to create a strong database of positive Nigerian people out there who are ready to contribute back home – as they did in Ireland and elsewhere.

8. Governance in Nigeria must greatly improve and very soon too. We must be purposeful and determined to make visible change.

9. Plan big positive ideas to engage the sweeping numbers of new emigrants – bonds and investments that can provide a long-term anchors for the emotions of our diasporans.

10. Come to terms with the reality of the geographical fluidity of the new generation and how physical location.

**Recent Development**

Recently, Imo State governor announced that he was trying to secure 4,000 foreign jobs for Imo youths. This statement met with acerbic comments from a section of Nigerians who believe it is wrong-headed. But I believe we should look at the realities again. Whether the Imo governor tries or not, Imo youths are everywhere looking to 'japa' from Nigeria if they have an opportunity. Perhaps the phenomenon is such that even governments now have to engage with it and let Nigerian youths know that we understand. A government-guided process will most likely yield more for Nigeria in the longer term, than leaving the process to individual struggles. Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Ireland, are countries that got wise and started to actively harness their diaspora power, sometimes even deliberately training youths for 'export'. Indeed, if our youths secure fairly good jobs in the right countries, under six months, the investment will pay off. Or how do we balance the fact that Nigeria trains doctors, nurses, and engineers for next to nothing (where most universities charge a fee of less than \$500 yearly per medical students), while we allow them to be cheaply harvested, in brains, mind, and spirit by these smarter countries. The tragedy is that these youths end up hating Nigeria which groomed them, in spite of her inefficiencies.

If Governor Uzodinma could actually secure jobs for 4,000 youths in the medical field, and they could started earning and sending money home to their folks, even at \$1,000 monthly (I know it's hard to save any money out there), that is \$4,000,000 monthly, or an equivalent of N4,000,000,000 at going rates. That's just for starters. These guys could transform Nigeria.

This brings me to the second issue. The Nigerian government has got wiser. Universities have been asked to ramp up the pace at which they produce medics – doctors and nurses (and indeed everyone in between – laboratory attendants, physiotherapists etc). The world cannot seem to have enough of them. Perhaps we ought to have started 10 years ago. I can imagine the thousands of students that have been frustrated out of their minds and refused to study medicine or other top courses especially in our public universities where lecturers still take delight in asserting their supremacy at every turn. But now, I understand that many universities are fixing to double their intakes. In 6 years, we shall hit an inflection point. And I believe the trick is to encourage Nigeria doctors who have matured abroad to start to give back home. It's the cycle of life. If Philippines can supply customer service people worldwide, we too

could hold the medical niche and we will be the better for it. Better still, medics earn a lot more and have fairly assured job security. Parents should also seize this opportunity. We cannot just be complaining about how Nigeria is bas. There are opportunities everywhere for those who can hold their breaths and logically pursue such.

To add to this potential for Nigeria to make a global mark by supplying the matured economies with medical personnel, Nigeria is currently working on tooling our technologically-inclined youths as well. The savvy minister for Digital Technology, Dr Bosun Tijani has launched what he calls the 3MTT (3 Million Technical Talents) whereby he intends to train three million young Nigerians in the tech space and make them employment-ready for the world. The Vice President's office also features another program titled iDICE (Investment in Digital and Creative Enterprises). This programme also targets as many as six million youths with jobs, training, and entrepreneurship opportunities, and makes millions ready for the world. Imagine that we could multiply the example of the Imo Governor by a factor of 100? That is a potential inflow of \$400 million monthly, or N400 billion from a fresh set of investments. That is \$4.8 billion yearly, and I am only being conservative really.

Nigerians have noticed that just as many of us are selling off houses and other properties in Nigeria to pay for visas and employment opportunities abroad, many Nigerians abroad are also keenly looking for houses to buy in Nigeria. A newspaper report last week narrated how the houses being abandoned or sold to feed the 'japa' phenomenon by fresh Nigerians, are being snapped up by fresher Nigerians abroad who are perhaps already sick and tired of the 'abroad' life. I guess it is a matter of conditioning, but most people will tell you that there is nowhere like home. Nigerians everywhere count themselves lucky to be from Nigeria – her failures apart. Is it the weather, the food, the people, the culture, the nature, the fact that it is only here in Nigeria that most Nigerians feel totally in control and at home? Is it even the economy? Yes, it could be much better run and the opportunities could be better unleashed and made available to all, given a broad mindset, but this is one place where people don't feel oppressed by the credit system, the insurance system, the policing system, the racial system, and all sorts of rigidities that sort of stifles and strangulates many foreigners after they may have achieved the basic needs. The opportunities not to remain basic for life, to achieve one's actualization, and transcendence – when one wants to start giving back to society and enjoying a dignified retirement – is here. So, this cycle of life is something we cannot stop. Indeed, I know that Britain is losing people to the USA. They too call it brain drain. Many athletes and academicians, not to talk of techies and engineers trained in the UK end up in the USA. Several articles exist online that clearly show how living in the USA is far better for working age people, than the UK. USA itself has recorded many incidents of losing their top brainiacs to China. The Chinese on the other hands – despite creating more engineers yearly than most nations on earth put together – are pushing their working population to everywhere in the world (Africa, Asia, South America, Europe etc).

*This brings me to the second issue. The Nigerian government has got wiser. Universities have been asked to ramp up the pace at which they produce medics – doctors and nurses (and indeed everyone in between laboratory attendants, physiotherapists etc). The world cannot seem to have enough of them. Perhaps we ought to have started 10 years ago.*

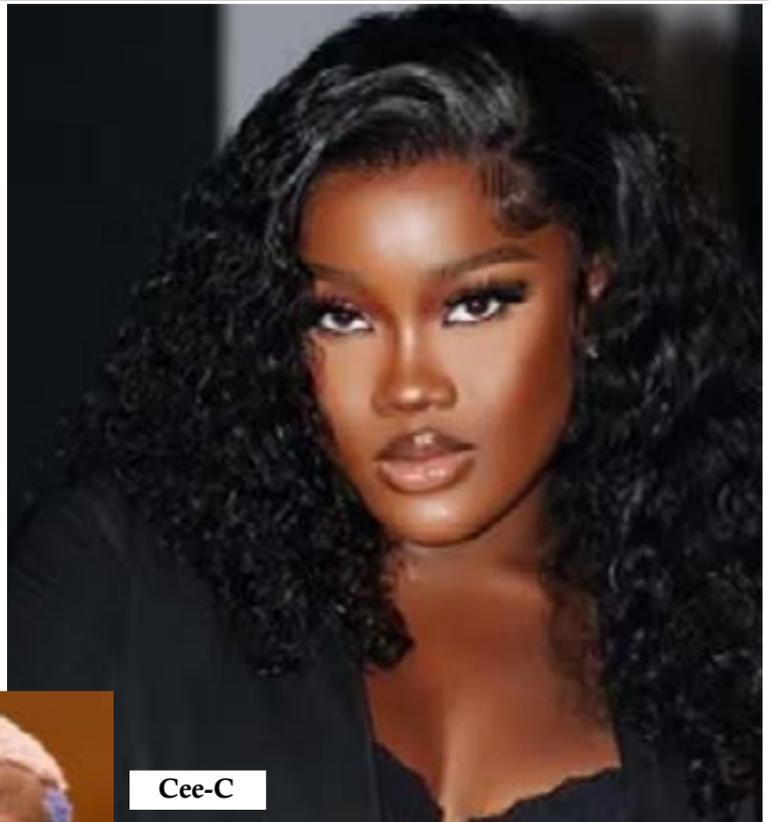


## ‘Nigerians not as smart as I thought’ - BBNaija star Cee-C

**H**elp, she has torn into Nigerians, saying that they are the reason the country is the way it is. Reality star Cynthia Nwadiora, popularly known as Cee-C, has something to say about Nigerians who spread false narratives about her during her time in the Big Brother house. The lawyer cum reality TV star expressed her disappointment during her time as a guest on the I Said What I Said Podcast. She was asked about the one thing that had changed after she

came out of the Big Brother All Stars house, and her response? “I think the kind of information I consume changed. I thought Nigerians knew better so coming out and hearing certain narratives and things that were not even true. I thought you guys were smarter than this, then I realised that Nigerians were not as smart as I thought. So that was shocking to me but I was like yeah, that is why our country is the way it is now,” she said. Going on, she was also asked if she was worth it she noted that

she wasn't sure. “I'm still trying to figure out whether it was worth it or not but I've accepted that I went back for a reason and God blessed me even the second time so we move,” she said. It was in the same interview that Cee-C described the Big Brother house as an insane place to be, adding that she actually struggled to keep her mental health intact during her time in the All Stars house.



Cee-C

## Portable now charges \$10,000 for collaborations & endorsements

**S**treet Pop sensation Portable is one of Nigeria's most popular artists whose social media antics far surpass the popularity of his music. The singer who goes by several nicknames including “Idamu Adugbon” which loosely translates to Neighbourhood Troublemaker is currently in the United Kingdom where he linked up with Nigerian British rapper Skepta. Portable's link-up with Skepta has dominated the news with the rapper taking him along to the British Fashion Award where Portable met several stars including Afrobeats royalty Tiwa Savage and Nigerian-British actor Damson Idris. Portable has been documenting every part of his time with Skepta via his social media and one of the clips he posted shows when Skepta gifted him a wad of cash. Portable also posted a video of him freestyling to a delightful

Skepta who appeared to be enjoying every bit of the link-up as much as Portable. With his social currency on a high, Portable has decided to review his rate card. In a new video he shared on social media, Portable reveals that he will now be charging a minimum of \$10,000 for collaborations, endorsements, and guest appearances. Portable said those who have had the privilege to work with him should count themselves lucky as he would now be charging a minimum of \$10,000 for a verse and for appearances or endorsements. He also stated that he would be charging a minimum of ten million naira as performance fee. With his ability to stir up public reaction and his large social media following, Portable seems capable of offering a healthy return for any brand willing to pay \$10,000 for his services.



Portable

## ... Makes waves chilling with Skepta at British Fashion awards

**N**igerian Street-Hop singer, Habeeb ‘Portable’ Okikiola has been having the time of his life hanging out with British-Nigerian rapper, Skepta at the British Fashion Awards. Numerous videos have surfaced on the internet of the controversial artiste having an absolute blast at the Royal Albert Hall, London, on Monday, December 4, 2023. He was seen walking the red carpet with Skepta and his crew, attracting calls from the adoring fans nearby. The energetic singer posed gallantly next on the red carpet, dressed in his snazzy suit with his trademark no-shirt-beneath-the-blazer. In an almost adorable clip, Portable had the widest smile after meeting singer Tiwa Savage, hugging her and calling her his “godmother.” Showering her with praises he said, “I don see my godmother, my godmother. God bless you mami.

I'm happy to see you and God bless you.” The singer posted numerous pictures and videos to his Instagram account, carrying his fans and followers along on his fun at the award show. In a viral clip, Portable sang one of his songs to Skepta, who sang along with him in a car. Celebrities including Anne Hathaway, Gwyneth Paltrow, Pamela Anderson, Charli XCX, Barbara Palvin, Rita Ora and Lily James also strutted across the red carpet at this year's event. The award show which serves as a fundraiser acknowledged and awarded many important figures like Jonathan Anderson for Designer of the Year; Sarah Burton for the Special Recognition Award, and Martine Rose for British Menswear Designer of the Year. Popular singer Sam Smith was the recipient of the Cultural Innovator Award.

## Wizkid's ‘Essence’ certified gold in France

**I**n another feat, Wizkid's ‘Essence’ featuring Tems and Justin Bieber has received another certification in France. In a post on the official Instagram page of France's certification body SNEP, ‘Essence’ has surpassed 15 million streams in France which has earned it a gold certification. The certification is the latest in a list of international certifications that make ‘Essence’ one of the most certified African songs globally. Released as one of the singles in Wizkid's Grammy-nominated fourth album ‘Made In Lagos’, ‘Essence’ enjoyed massive commercial success that rocketed it to international acclaim. Aided by the Justin Bieber remix, the single peaked at No. 9 on the Billboard Hot 100 while also peaking at NO. 16 on the UK Official Singles chart. The single has received platinum plaques in the US, UK, Switzerland, Canada, and South Africa.



Wizkid

‘Essence’ was nominated for the 2021 Grammys for Best Global Music Performance. According to its Wikipedia page, the hit single has won 10 awards including the 2021 BET award for Best Collaboration and the 2021 Soul Train award for Song of the Year.

## CARDI B says she's outgrowing relationships, unfollows husband offset

**C**ardi B shared some cryptic posts that had people wondering, ‘what is happening?’ American rapper, Cardi B and her husband, rapper Offset, have unfollowed each other on Instagram, fuelling speculations of a rift between them. This comes after Cardi B posted two cryptic messages on her Instagram story, discussing the importance of self-focus and outgrowing relationships. The posts immediately got fans worried about the state of her six-year-long marriage to the former Migos rapper. “You know when you just outgrow relationships,” she wrote on one slide, which was followed by, “I'm tired of protecting people's feelings... I GOTTA PUT MYSELF FIRST.” Cardi B's story post that people think might be directed at Offset [Instagram/iamcardiB] Offset, on the other hand, also posted his own cryptic message on his Instagram story - a clip from the movie Scarface where Al Pacino's character said, “Hey, f\*\*k you, man! Who put this thing together? Me! Who do I trust? Me!” This development comes merely two months after Offset surprised Cardi with an extravagant flower arrangement in their house, for her birthday on October 12, 2023. On that day, she expressed her gratitude by fawning over him and penning a heartwarming note on Instagram. “Thank you soo much babe. You always go beyond for me. I love your skin, I love your face, I love your body, your ankles, I love your soul, I love your heart, I love your fart, I love your faith, I love your talent, I will BITE anybody for you lmaooooo,” her post read. The couple has admittedly had a rocky marriage over the years, but have managed to pull through each issue. Back in 2020, Cardi B filed for divorce on the grounds of repeated infidelity on Offset's part, but that was shoved to the side after they settled their differences. Since then, they've had rough patches on and off, with the most recent being in June 2023, when Offset publicly accused her of cheating on him - an accusation she blatantly denied on Twitter, reminding him not to “accuse her of things he knows that he is guilty of.”



Cardi B and partner

**'Nigerians not as smart as I thought'**  
- BBNaija star Cee-C



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**SPORTS**



**EPL: McTominay's double delivers Man Utd win over Chelsea**

Scott McTominay scored twice as Manchester United beat Chelsea 2-1 on Wednesday

Scott McTominay scored twice as Manchester United beat Chelsea 2-1 on Wednesday to ease the pressure on manager Erik ten Hag and put Mauricio Pochettino under the spotlight.

Ten Hag got the response he desired after a dreadful display in a 1-0 defeat to Newcastle on Saturday as United produced arguably their best performance of the season.

A sixth win in eight league games lifts United up to sixth and within three points of champions Manchester City in fourth. Despite shelling out over £1 billion (\$1.26 billion) on new players in three transfer windows, Chelsea remain down in 10th.

Hope that the arrival of Pochettino would usher in a quick turnaround in fortunes has proved short-lived as the Argentine has won just five of his first 15 league games in charge. Ten Hag had been under increasing scrutiny amid reports of dressing room disquiet.

But his big decision to drop Mar-

cus Rashford to the bench among four changes paid dividends as the Dutchman was rewarded with a far more energetic and enterprising display. Chelsea had goalkeeper Robert Sanchez to thank for getting in level at the break.

United had 18 shots on goal before half-time — the most Chelsea have faced in one half in the Premier League for 20 years — but only had one goal to show for it. A VAR intervention to award a penalty after Enzo Fernandez stood on Antony's foot gave the home side a glorious chance to open the scoring.

But Sanchez flew low to his right to parry Bruno Fernandes' spot-kick and Alejandro Garnacho blazed the rebound over. United's determination to flood forward was also leaving gaps for Chelsea to exploit on the counter-attack.

Mykhailo Mudryk struck the outside of the post and the Ukrainian should have sent Raheem Sterling clean through on goal but for a poor pass that ruined another promising break.

Sanchez was called into action once more to save a powerful effort



Ten Hag

from Garnacho, while Antony's wait to break a 24-match run without a goal goes on as he fired tamely into the Spanish international's arms. Chelsea and Sanchez's resistance was finally broken when McTominay swept home his fifth goal of the season to become United's top scorer in the Premier League on 19 minutes.

The Scottish midfielder should have had a second moments later when his header from point-blank range and follow-up effort were both excellently saved by Sanchez.

And the hosts were made to pay as Chelsea levelled before half-time.

Cole Palmer was allowed to jink his way along the edge of the box and slotted into the far corner beyond Andre Onana's grasp.

Chelsea could have turned the game on its head early in the second half had Nicolas Jackson not wasted a glorious chance when he headed over unmarked from a corner at the back post. But United were quickly back on the front foot.

Garnacho continued to curse his luck as a curling effort drifted inches wide. However, the Argentine had a hand in the winning goal as his cross was powered in by McTominay's header 21 minutes from time.

McTominay should have a hat-trick when he skewed horribly wide with just Sanchez to beat.

United's profligacy gave Chelsea the chance to snatch a point late on when Armando Broja headed against the crossbar.

But that would have been more than the Blues deserved as Pochettino struggles to turn Chelsea's abundance of young talent into a functioning unit.



Some Man U players celebrate a goal against Chelsea on Wednesday

**Fans praise Osimhen for bagging Italy's Best Player award**

Nigerian fans have hailed Napoli's prolific striker, Victor Osimhen, after the Italian Footballers' Association named him the Footballer of The Year for his stellar performance with the Neapolitans during the 2022/23 season.

The award ceremony, held on Monday night, recognised outstanding achievements across various categories, including the Team of The Year, Coach of The Year, Club of The Year, and Goal of The Season.

Osimhen's contribution of 26 goals played a pivotal role in securing the Partenopei's first Scudetto in 33 years. And his exceptional performance not only earned him recognition at the AIC Oscar del Calcio but also positioned him as a nominee for prestigious awards such as the FIFA Best and Ballon d'Or, where he secured an impressive eighth place in the final rankings.

His stellar form secured him a spot in the Serie A Team of The Year, standing alongside exceptional players such as Mike Maignan, Giovanni Di Lorenzo, Kim Min-jae, Andrea Bastoni, Theo Hernandez, Stanislav Lobotka, Hakan Calhanoglu, Nicolo Barella, Rafael Leao and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia.

Despite facing challenges at the onset of the 2023/24 campaign and recent injury struggles, Osimhen's remarkable goal-scoring record persists, with a commendable six goals from 10 league appearances.

In gratitude for the recognition, Osimhen stated on social media platform, X, "Thank you @GranGalaAIC for the recognition and awards, thank you my family, friends, and supporters for your votes and unending support. GOD is the Greatest."

Several fans took to their X-ac-



Osimhen

counts on social media to laud Osimhen's achievements and - express their admiration.

Asiwaju Lerry celebrated Osimhen's achievement and is already anticipating the Nigerian's emergence as the African Player of the Year next Monday. "Victor Osimhen wins the award for the best player in Serie A at the AIC Oscar del Calcio. CAF African Player of the Year award is next week, it's coming home," he wrote.

A Nigerian named Shola expressed enthusiasm, writing, "Victor Osimhen is the name. Can't wait to see this lad win more."

Mibanti, under the handle @RealMibanti, praised Osimhen's accomplishment, urging him to continue bringing pride to Nigeria saying, "Victor Osimhen won the best player in Serie A. Keep making Nigeria proud."

Yimzy, known as @oyimzy, hailed Osimhen's character as he wrote, "He embodies class, hard work and dedication. Victor Osimhen."

**Chelsea hands Osimhen transfer lifeline**

Just three days after English Premier League side, Chelsea, were dealt a heavy blow in their pursuit of Victor Osimhen, after Napoli president, Aurelio De Laurentiis, claimed that the Nigeria international was about to sign a new contract at the Serie A club, Italian transfer guru, Fabrizio Romano, has offered some hopes in his latest report, The PUNCH reports.

News of Osimhen joining Chel-

sea had been making the rounds with the London club reportedly showing serious interest in signing the striker as early as January.

Last season, he scored 31 goals across all competitions as Napoli ended their wait for a Serie A title after a 33-year hiatus.

His impressive performances saw a host of clubs interested in his service during the summer but the Naples-based club managed to hold onto their star.

Recently, De Laurentiis, while addressing reporters, asserted that Osimhen was on the verge of signing a contract extension at Napoli that was proposed last summer.

The Napoli boss comments left some Chelsea fans devastated as they had hoped of signing the Nigerian, who recently said that club's legend, Didier Drogba, was his idol, with the Ivorian also picking the Nigerian striker as his favourite active footballer.

However, according to Romano, Blues fans should be optimistic as Osimhen's future still hangs ambiguously in the balance.



Victor Osimhen