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## News

# “Sit in your office and work for Nigerians,” Oshiomhole knocks Uzoka over N1bn Switzerland trip budget

A member of the Senate Committee on Trade, Senator Adams Oshiomhole, has criticised the Minister for Trade, Industry and Investments, Doris Uzoka, for proposing N1 billion in the 2024 budget for a foreign trip to Geneva, Switzerland. Uzoka

appeared before the Senate Committee on Trade on Tuesday, December 12, to defend her budget.

According to report, the Minister told the Joint Committee that N905 million was earmarked for overhead costs while N8.1 billion was allocated to capital expend-

iture. Reacting to her presentation, Oshiomhole, Senator representing Edo North, urged the Minister to utilise in-country expertise to cut costs, emphasising the need for home-grown products and questioning the lack of data on Nigeria's Balance of Trade.

He said, “I see that you intend to travel to Geneva next year and you have budgeted over N1bn for that.

“We can't keep going on with over-bloated teams on foreign trips. Use the experts we have in your offices in the country to save costs. “Madam sit in your office and work for Nigerians. I have gone there twice.

“You are always in the Bank of Industry. If you preferred BOI, you should have declined the President's nomination to be a minister. “Let's practise what we preach. We can't talk about industrialisation and keep

importing toothpicks and tyres. We must ensure that we have homegrown products.

“What is our balance of trade, especially with China? Those countries exporting things to Nigeria are expected to build factories in Nigeria. We have to take advantage of our population to grow our industries?”

In her response, the minister defending her budget stated that she could work from anywhere, and revealed plans to establish a Trade Intelligence Unit for generating and storing trade data.

She said, “I assure you that I can work from anywhere and give Nigerians results. My office is currently under renovation. “Sir, I regret to say that we seem to have no record of our balance of trade.

Or at least, it doesn't exist in the ministry and that is why we initiated a new unit called Trade Intelligence Unit to ensure that such data is generated and stored.”

However, Oshiomhole disputing the claim, asserted that relevant data already exists with agencies like the CBN and Customs.

## Nigeria's Oil production fell 3 million barrels in November, OPEC data reveals

Nigeria suffered a setback in its effort to meet its Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) crude oil quota in November, under-producing by as much as 3 million barrels in the whole of the month compared to October. According to the OPEC figures released on Wednesday, the country self-reported a production of 1.25 million barrels per day in November, compared to 1.35 million bpd the previous month. This amounted to a loss of 100,000 bpd, resulting in a deficit of 3 million barrels for the entire 30 days of November. Nigeria has struggled to meet its OPEC quota for over three years, blaming oil theft, asset vandalism as well as waning investment in the oil sector as some of the reasons for the challenge. However, the 1.25 million bpd excluded condensates which are outside OPEC's computation of total crude oil produced during any month. The Minister of State, Petroleum Resources (Oil), Senator Heineken Lokpobiri, has insisted that Nigeria will surpass 1.7 million bpd in 2024. Giving an overview of Nigeria's economy in Q3, 2023, OPEC said the country's 3.1 per cent y-o-y increase, surpassing the 2.6 per cent y-o-y growth in Q2, 2023 and 2.4 per cent y-o-y in Q1, 23, was attributable to strong activity in the non-oil sectors, especially in services and agriculture. “However, there are concerns about inflationary

pressures in Nigeria, with the inflation rate reaching 27.3 per cent y-o-y. This acceleration is largely attributed to persistent second-round effects following the removal of petrol subsidies and the devaluation of the naira. “The current inflation rate compares to 26.7 per cent y-o-y in September and 25.8 per cent in August” it said, stressing that Nigeria faces a “challenging economic situation ahead.” OPEC also said it remained cautiously optimistic about 2024 oil market fundamentals and blamed “exaggerated concerns” about demand for a recent drop in prices, as it stuck to its relatively high 2024 oil use prediction. Oil has weakened to a six-month low near \$72 a barrel, even after OPEC+, which includes OPEC oil-exporting nations and allies such as Russia, on November 30 announced a new round of production cuts for the first quarter of 2024. But in the monthly report, it said it remained “cautiously optimistic about the fundamental factors affecting oil market dynamics in 2024” and said speculators had played a major role in pushing prices lower. “Crude oil futures prices experienced a significant downturn, marked by heavy selloffs amidst a highly volatile futures market,” OPEC said. “The market dynamic was fuelled by exaggerated concerns

about oil demand growth, which negatively impacted market sentiment,” it added. The cartel kept its forecast for world oil demand growth in 2023 steady at 2.46 million bpd. In 2024, OPEC sees demand growth of 2.25 million bpd, also unchanged from last month. OPEC+ oil producers have been cutting production since late 2022 to support the market in a series of steps. The OPEC report noted that OPEC oil production fell in November, ending a series of increases. Iran, exempt from OPEC supply cuts because of US sanctions, has been boosting output in 2023 in a trend that analysts say appears to be the result of Iran's success in evading the sanctions and US discretion in enforcing them. Nigeria and Angola have been recovering from internal challenges that have limited their output. But in November, OPEC pumped 27.84 million bpd, down 57,000 bpd from October, the report said, citing figures from secondary sources, as production in Iraq, Angola and Nigeria decreased. A certain survey had earlier on December 6 put OPEC output last month close to the level at 27.81 million bpd. Saudi Arabia, which extended a voluntary cut of 1 million bpd into the first quarter of 2024 as part of the November 30 OPEC+ deal, told OPEC that it cut production by 122,000 bpd to 8.818 million bpd in November.

## We've reduced number of road crashes in Enugu – FRSC

The Federal Road Safety Corps, FRSC, Enugu State Command, has said that it has succeeded in reducing road accidents in the state between January 1 and November 30, 2023.

The state sector commander, Adeyemi Sokunbi, stated this on Thursday, saying that the corps recorded a reduction in the number of persons involved in crashes to 763 from January to November 2023 compared to the 1,576 recorded in the same period in 2022.

He also pointed out that the number of vehicles involved in road crashes was reduced to 174 in 2023 as against 314

in 2022. “The number of Road Traffic Crashes (RTC) reduced to 108 in 2023 as against 186 in 2022, and the number of fatalities reduced to 35 in 2023 as against 49 in 2022,” Sokunbi said.

According to him, the total fatalities reduced to 438 between January 1 and November 30, 2023, as against 646 in the same period in 2022.

He added that the sharp reduction in crashes was due to

the strong and continuous engagement of transport stakeholders and the general motoring public by the FRSC. According to him, “We appreciate the FRSC Corps Marshal, Dauda Biu, and the FRSC South-East Zonal Commander, Assistant Corps Marshal, Isaac Ameh, for providing guidance and logistics for the robust stakeholders' engagement to be possible.”

## Ebonyi: Ex-deputy Speaker dumps PDP for APC

A former Deputy Speaker of the Ebonyi State House of Assembly, Odefa Obasi Odefa, has defected from the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, to the All Progressives Congress, APC. Odefa defected from PDP to APC alongside about 500 of his supporters from the Onicha East Constituency.

He disclosed this at the state's Government House in Abakaliki during a visit to Governor Ogbonnaya

Nwifuru. A former Deputy Speaker of the Ebonyi State House of Assembly, Odefa Obasi Odefa, has defected from the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, to the All Progressives Congress, APC. Odefa defected from PDP to APC alongside about 500 of his supporters from the Onicha East Constituency. He disclosed this at the state's Government House in Abakaliki during a visit to Governor Ogbonnaya Nwifuru. Speaking on his defection,

Odefa said his decision to “pitch tent with the APC was to rally round the governor in his efforts to transform the state having studied his good intentions as captured in his manifesto.”

Responding, Nwifuru said the door of the APC was wide open to accommodate all well-intentioned individuals into the party. Nwifuru assured the defectors of a level-playing field in APC. He also urged them to join hands with him to develop the state.

This was even as the Managing Director/CEO of the Enugu State Investment Development Authority and Focal Person of State Action on Business Enabling Reforms (SABER), Dr. Sam Ogbu-Nwobodo, said the Small Claims Courts was in keeping with the administration's determination to grow the state's economy from \$4.4bn to \$30bn in the next four to eight years by making the state the best investment destination in Nigeria.

Speaking during the event,

## Enugu inaugurates 10 Small Claims Courts

The Enugu State Government has inaugurated 10 Small Claims Courts to address the challenge of delays in settlement of financial disputes, especially debt recovery and other liquidated money demand.

Performing the inauguration in Enugu, the Chief Judge, Justice Afojulu Ozomena, said the courts, which will be presided by magistrates, would entertain financial disputes ranging from N5 million to N10 million, and commended Governor Peter Mbah, who also doubles as the Chairman of Enugu State Ease of Doing Business Council “for his commitment to effective justice dispensation in the state,” noting “the milestone is part of the fulfillment of His Excellency's manifesto.”

In line with the foregoing, the Small Claims Court was created with specific duties and powers. It is a specialized court designed to provide judicial determination of disputes involving small amounts of money.

“The Court provides an accessible, inexpensive, speedy forum for dispute resolution of small monetary claims. The claims can be heard with or without legal representation. Small Claims Court, ordinarily, is a court of limited

the Chief Judge of Enugu State, who was represented by Justice Reuben Odugu, said: “In human interactions and communications, particularly, in the conduct of business, it is almost inevitable that disagreements will occur which usually will require the intervention of the judicial system for their resolution.

“Consequently, the ability to resolve contractual disputes on real time basis is, therefore, fundamental in ensuring that both the markets and economies function properly. “In order to fulfill this obligation, the adoption of a system of dispute resolution that is fast, informal and inexpensive becomes imperative.

“In line with the foregoing, the Small Claims Court was created with specific duties and powers. It is a specialized court designed to provide judicial determination of disputes involving small amounts of money.

“The Court provides an accessible, inexpensive, speedy forum for dispute resolution of small monetary claims. The claims can be heard with or without legal representation. Small Claims Court, ordinarily, is a court of limited

ed Jurisdiction that hears disputes between litigants in the Magistrates' Courts.

“The legal framework for the operation of the court in Enugu State has been put in place. The Magistrates' Court Law (Practice Directions on Small Claims) 2023 (the “Practice Directions”) made pursuant to the Magistrates' Courts Law of Enugu State, 2004 was issued in the month of July, 2023.

“The Magistrates' Court Law of Enugu State and the Magistrates' Court (Civil Procedure) Rules of Enugu State are applicable to the proceedings in the Small Claims Court, particularly, in areas not covered by the Practice Directions, 2023.

“The monetary jurisdiction of the Court is N5,000,000 and a maximum of N10,000,000 in the case of a counter claim.” He thanked the secretariat of the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) for being of immense support in the training of the 10 Learned magistrates and 10 assistant chief registrars towards the establishment and operationalisation of the courts, adding that the courts would start entertaining cases soon after the inauguration.

## Boundary disputes: Govt sues for peace in Anambra

The Anambra State government has sued for peaceful resolution among communities embroiled in boundary disputes in the state.

It was gathered that some communities involved in boundary disputes in the state include Amudo Awka (Awka South Local Council), Egbeagu/ Okukwa/ Amanda (Awka North), Abba, Ukpo and Ukwulu communities in Dunukofia Council Area, among others, were present at the meeting to represent their communities.

The Deputy Governor, Dr.

Onyeka Chukwu Ibezim, said that the government took the stance at the State Boundary Committee meeting, held at the Government House, Awka, yesterday, although he could not mention the number of outstanding disputes waiting to be resolved.

Ibezim frowned on the number of boundary disputes in the state, stressing that his committee is deeply committed to resolving them.

He noted that the committee's target is to settle protracted land disputes amongst communities and enthrone peace across the state before the end of next year.

# News

## Increase petrol price to N750/Litre, World Bank tells FG

The World Bank has said the federal government may still be paying for petrol subsidy as fuel prices in Nigeria are currently not cost-reflective. It said Nigerians should pay about N750 per litre as against the current price of N650 in some places.

With current prices, many Nigerians have parked their vehicles even as costs of basic necessities of life have skyrocketed and value of income of citizens eroded by inflation.

Many observers have already condemned the World Bank's prescription and advised the federal government to look for a

home-grown solution to the prevailing economic challenges in the country.

The publication had reported in September that despite the numerous assurances by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu that the petrol subsidy regime was gone, the government paid N169.4 billion as subsidy in August to keep the pump price at N620 per litre.

The World Bank's lead economist for Nigeria, Alex Sienaert, confirmed the continuous payment of petrol subsidy by the government in Abuja yesterday during his presentation of the Nigeria Development Update (NDU), December 2023 Edition. He said: "It

does seem like petrol prices are not fully adjusting to market conditions. So, that hints at the partial return of the subsidy if we estimate what is the cost reflective of the retail PMS price of the would-be and assume that importation is done at the official FX rate. "Of course, the liberalization is happening with the parallel rates, which is the main supplier, the price would be even higher. These are just estimates to give you a sense of what cost-reflective pricing most likely looks like. "We think the price of petrol should be around N750 per litre more than the N650 per litre currently paid by Nigerians."

According to the NDU report, on the fiscal front, it will be crucial to sustain the savings from the PMS subsidy reform. The report said the high cost of the gasoline subsidy was weakening Nigeria's fiscal position, in turn leading to a rapid increase in deficit monetization through CBN Ways and Means financing and fueling inflation.

"It is important that the subsidy is not reinstated, and that continued progress is made to ensure market-reflecting pricing," it said. The report noted that removing the PMS subsidy creates an opportunity to open up the gasoline market, enabling other market players apart from NNPC to import gasoline.

"This would yield bene-

fits to consumers from market competition, and more revenues to the Federation Account, ultimately flowing to all tiers of government."

The World Bank's NDU report also stated that by 2025, Nigeria should have over N11 trillion saved from fuel subsidy removal. The removal of subsidy on fuel which came into effect on June 1, 2023, is expected to save the government around N2 trillion in 2023, which is about 0.9% of the country's total economic output.

"Looking ahead, between 2023 and 2025, the anticipated savings could exceed N11 trillion compared to a scenario where the subsidy continued." According to the Office of the

Accountant General of the Federation (OAGF), fiscal accounts reports, gains in net oil revenues of the federation were lower than what they should have been given the removal of the costly gasoline subsidy.

It stated: "The subsidy used to cost about N380 billion monthly, and it was assumed that removing it would significantly boost the country's oil revenues.

"However, most of the reported revenue gains in the second half of 2023 were due to exchange rate improvements. "Without these gains, oil revenue from January to August would have dropped by 0.2% of the entire yearly economic output, mainly occurring between July and August.



Governor Siminalayi Fubara presents the N800bn 2024 budget estimates before the Edison Ehie-led group of the Rivers State House of Assembly at the Government House on Wednesday.

### Uzodimma's Orientation SA, Fidel Onyeneke appeals for hospitality during 2023 Yuletide

The Special Adviser to the Governor on Imo Orientation Agency, Chief Dr. Fidel Onyeneke has appealed to Imo residents to show high level of warm reception and generosity, Cordiality to persons who will enter the state for Christmas celebrations. Chief Onyeneke who made the appeal in Owerri on Tuesday, said that people should have open mind and shun any act that would threaten any individual during this Yuletide period. He stressed the need for harmony and peaceful co-existence in the various Communities, as a deliberate effort to give everybody a sense of belonging. Chief Onyeneke, emphasised the

need to shun all forms of exploitation and discriminatory tendencies capable of making life unbearable for anybody. He urged the masses not to see the Christmas period as an opportunity for unwarranted acquisition of wealth and ostentatious lifestyle. The Special Adviser urged Leaders at all levels and other individuals to set in motion, appropriate machinery that would check the excesses of miscreants whose interest is to cause mayhem and other acts of insecurity especially in the rural areas. He challenged Youths to occupy themselves skills rather than getting involved with nefarious acts including Robbery and Kidnapping, capable of ruining their life.

Chief Onyeneke also urged the Security Operatives to exhibit professionalism and proactiveness as they protect the property and lives of the citizens at this festive period. The Special Adviser expressed happiness that Imo State government had embarked on the rehabilitation of some rural roads as well put on ground the needed facilities to further enhance security in different parts of the State. Chief Onyeneke appealed to Imo residents to be very accommodating and discourage utterances and behaviors that would deter the returnees and visitors alike from confidence in the government and its Agencies.

### Low COVID-19 vaccination among Anambra health workers worries WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) has expressed concern over the low COVID-19 vaccination coverage among health workers in Anambra State.

As of October 8th, only 8 per cent, about 320, of over 4,000 health workers in the state have completed their vaccinations, raising critical questions about vaccine hesitancy and trust within the healthcare community.

Dr. Adamu Abdul-Nasir, State Coordinator for WHO, highlighted the discrepancy between the national vaccination rate for health workers (38%) and the alarmingly low rate in Anambra.

He expressed worry that this hesitancy among health workers might be influencing the general public's perception of the vaccine. "Is it that they are doubting the potency of the vaccine?"

This is a major challenge," Dr. Abdul-Nasir stated. The CanGIVE project, a three-month initiative implemented in 15 states, aims to prioritize vaccination among high-risk groups like health workers, pregnant women, individuals with co-morbid-

ities, and the elderly.

While Anambra boasts the second-highest vaccination rate for the elderly in the country (90%), the overall coverage remains low, prompting the need for urgent intervention. Dr Placid Uliagbafusi, State Director for Disease and Immunisation, acknowledged that Anambra is currently the lowest-performing state among those selected for the CanGIVE project.

He emphasized the importance of engaging stakeholders and community influencers to increase awareness and address vaccine hesitancy.

"Unfortunately, we, the health workers, are the worse culprits in terms of rejecting the vaccine," Dr Uliagbafusi admitted.

"We have to show people that we have accepted the vaccine we are administering to them. The engagement meeting focused on crafting strategies to promote vaccine uptake within the community through social mobilization, community outreach, and addressing misinformation around the vaccine.

Stakeholders discussed the need to involve non-govern-

mental organizations, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, and the media to create a coordinated effort and achieve the goals of the CanGIVE project.

### Abia Govt denies arresting elders, youths who demanded 'settlement' on road project

The Special Assistant to Abia State Governor Alex Otti on Public Communications, Mr Dodo Okafor, has debunked reports that the state government arrested some elders and youths who were invited for peace talks in Umuahia.

It was reported that some elders and youths, who demanded 'marching ground' settlement before the commencement of works on the Port Harcourt road project in Aba, were invited to Umuahia and locked up by the state government. Okafor debunked the reports in a statement posted on his social media handle on Tuesday.

He accused those he

described as 'agents of division' of spreading false reports and lies against the state government.

Parts of the statement read, "To begin with, majority of Ndi Abia from all clans across the state, irrespective of their cultural and religious leanings are profoundly appreciative of the Gov. Otti's resolve to rehabilitate the long-abandoned Port Harcourt road which until its collapse in the mid-1990s, was a major hub for the sale and repair of heavy duty machineries and spare parts, serving the Port Harcourt industrial complex, further consolidating Aba's reputation as a major market for manufacturers and big businesses across the

country and beyond.

"It is estimated that the collapse and subsequent abandonment of Port Harcourt road by previous administrations cost the city hundreds of billions of naira in earnings, job opportunities and other missed opportunities.

"It then beggars belief that anyone or group would wish to stand against the resolve of the Otti administration to fix that stretch of road, solve the perennial flooding problems in that part of Aba, and make the environment business-friendly once again, as envisaged by Governor Sam Mbakwe of old Imo State who constructed the road to expand the frontiers of economic opportunities in Aba.

"For the records, reports of protests by some youth and subsequent invitation to Umuahia by Governor Alex Otti is untrue and a figment of the imagination of those promoting it, for reasons we cannot immediately determine."

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## Editorial

# Exempting Public Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges Of Education from IPPIS Payment Platform

The Federal Executive Council (FEC) has approved the exemption of public tertiary institutions, including universities, from the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Systems (IPPS). Minister of Education, Professor Mamman Tahir, who disclosed this to newsmen on Wednesday after the week's FEC meeting presided over by President Bola Tinubu at the State House, Abuja, also said Council relieved managements of tertiary institutions of the burden of obtaining approval and waiver from the Office of the Head of Federal Civil Service for recruitment. He stressed that the exemption of tertiary institutions from the IPPIS platform and from seeking Head of Civil Service's authority for recruitment would allow the institutions to deal with salary issues of their staff, as well as recruitment internally. According to him, FEC took the decision to remove the institutions from the IPPIS system because of its concern for efficiency and the management of the institutions. Tahir, added that apart from the opposition to the payment system by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the IPPS issue had proved time consuming for university vice chancellors. The Minister explained that as the tertiary institutions are governed by laws, they should be allowed to exercise their autonomy. His words: "It was a very happy day for the education sector because one of the problems which the vice chancellors, rectors and provosts of colleges of education, those managing the tertiary sector in Nigeria, have been complaining about has been the subscription to the IPPIS.

"You know what IPPIS does, which has made recruitment and many other activities of the university remitting to personnel very difficult. Now today's Council decided, the President has directed that vice chancellor should no longer...they have been taken out of that service. So this is a very, very important development for the vice chancellors that will allow for efficient management of the universities and tertiary education generally speaking. "Then secondly, which is connected to that, before now when the tertiary institutions want to make an appointment, they have to write to the Office of the Head of Service for waiver or approval or that sort of thing. "Today, the Council, through the directive of the President, has exempted them. They don't have to go to the Office of the Head of Service because it is actually not in their line of supervision. Shedding more light on FEC approval on IPPIS, Minister of Information and National Orientation, Muhammed Idris, said "today, the universities and other tertiary institutions have gotten a very big relief from the integrated personnel payroll and information system. You will recall that the university authorities and the others have been clamouring for the exemption of the universities and other tertiary institutions from this system. "Today, council has graciously approved that. What that means is that going forward, the universities like the

Honorable Minister of Education has said and other tertiary institutions, the polytechnics and colleges of education will be taken off the IPPIS. "What that means in simple language is that the university authorities and other tertiary institutions will now be paying their own personnel from their own end instead of relying on the IPPIS", he said. The IPPIS had been a bone of contention between university lecturers under the aegis of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the past administration of President Muhammadu Buhari.

In 2020, ASUU, which went on a eight-month strike due to disputes with the Federal Government regarding the payment platform opted for the University Transparency Account System (UTAS). The IPPIS was introduced by the federal government in October 2006 as part of its reform initiatives to effectively store personnel records and promote transparency and accountability. Also on Wednesday, FEC approved the sum of N2.2 billion to procure some navigational communication equipment for Port Harcourt International Airport. Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo, in his press briefing after the Council meeting explained that the equipment to be procured is mainly for communication and is called remote assets devices and other accessories to be used for the wide-area multilateral air traffic management system. He said: "The memo to Council has to do with some navigational equipment at the Port Harcourt International Airport. The communication equipment. They call them the VHF FM radios, remote assets, devices and other accessories for the wide area multilateration air traffic management system at Port Harcourt.

"What we want to do is that once we concentrate on the part of aviation that attracts the optics or call the optics to clean toilets, the buildings go there arrival halls and all of that, that the public will want to see we see all the time. There are very complex issues behind the scenes that have to do with the safety of our air spaces and all of that." Keyamo stressed that the equipment will focus on the optic part of the aviation industry, facilitating more travellers' safety. "So we are purchasing this equipment for topcoats international airports at the sum of 2,227,000,007 Naira inclusive of 7.5% VAT with a delivery period of nine months and it has been awarded in favour of a company that is the representative of one of the best companies in the world that produce such navigation such communication equipment for the aviation sector". Stemming on the above, we laud President Bola Tinubu administration for understanding the plight of ASUU's pursuit for the removal of IPPIS as a payment platform for Universities and other tertiary institutions in the country; which the former administration of Muhammad Buhari through his Labour Minister, Chris Ngige, used to stifle the educational system in the country.

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## Opinion

# Nigeria Police In Civil Cases

By Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa, SAN

The cost has become monumental and enormous, for the nation to bear. How do you spend so much money, time and energy, to train a special force to combat crime, to protect lives and property, only for its members to rubbish all those efforts with their preference for unwarranted interference in civil disputes? The Nigeria Police Force is gradually losing identity, as a law enforcement agency set up to preserve law and order in the society. All over the land, policemen and women have taken over the duties of judicial officers and the courts, to declare victors in land disputes, to assist landlords to forcefully evict tenants and to help spouses themselves. It is a story of how not to police the nation. The law enforcement agencies and their collaborators have always been hiding under the principle that citizens have a responsibility to lay complaints where they suspect that a crime has been or is about to be committed. In that wise, a good number of people have walked away from damages that they richly deserve, for malicious prosecution. But that narrative has changed for good now, with the latest decision of the Supreme Court on this point.

Not too long ago, in the case of *Kure v C.O.P. (2020) 9 NWLR (Pt. 1729) 296*, the Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment that has sealed the hope of the police in meddling in civil matters. The facts of the case are that the appellant was introduced to a director in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Rivers State, as a consultant in wild animals, whereupon an agreement was reached for the appellant to supply Giraffes, Zebras and other animals at the cost of N3.5m, which sum was paid into the appellant's bank account, with a promise to deliver the animals within two weeks. The appellant did not deliver upon his promise, whereas it was discovered that he had withdrawn substantial part of the money deposited in his bank account. The complainant thereafter contacted a lawyer who applied for and obtained an order of lien on the account into which the money was paid. A letter of complaint was written to the Commissioner of Police, Kaduna State, whereupon the appellant was subsequently arrested and arraigned before a Chief Magistrate's Court, Kaduna on a First Information Report on allegation of criminal breach of trust and cheating. The appellant pleaded not guilty and upon due trial, he was convicted. His appeals to the High Court and the Court of Appeal were dismissed, prompting his final appeal to the Supreme Court. In its landmark judgment, the Supreme Court held thus: "The primary duty of the Police by section 4 of the Police Act is the prevention of crime, investigation and detection of crime and the prosecution of offenders. See *Ibiyeye v. Gold (2012) All FWLR (Pt. 659) 1074*. The police is not a debt recovery agency and has no business to dabble into contractual disputes between parties arising from purely civil transactions. See *McLaren v. Jennings (2003) FWLR (Pt. 154) 528*; *(2003) 3 NWLR (Pt. 808) 470*. When, as in the circumstances of this action, a purely civil matter is reported to the police, such a person cannot go scot-free as the report ought not to have been made at all since it is not within the purview of police duties.

It is a report made mala fide and he will be equally liable for the action taken by the Police irrespective of whether he actively instigated them or not, since he had no



Kayode Egbetokun

business involving the Police in a purely civil matter in the first place. Such conduct which portrays disregard of the law and is aimed at using the coercive powers of the State to punish a contracting party in purely civil matters ought to be mulcted in exemplary damages. See *Okafor & Anor v. AIG Police Zone II Onikan & Ors (2019) LPELR-46505*. Mrs. Sokari Davies being an enlightened person knows that reporting such a matter to the Police, instead of going to court to seek enforcement of the said contract or damages for breach of same, wickedness and mala fide. The charges for cheating and criminal breach of trust cannot have a place against the appellant, let alone proving it to a conviction. The appellant is hereby discharged and acquitted. He in fact deserves an unreserved apology from Mrs. Sokari Davies who set unjustly and mala fide the criminal stone rolling against the appellant." We have been in this legal battle with the police and other law enforcement agencies for a very long time. In its Lagos Office, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, has departments for debt recovery, where the Banks have become principalities. Most civil contracts, involving financial transactions, loans and mortgages are daily being investigated by the EFCC and criminalized. The above case of *Kure v. COP* reinforces various decisions of the Supreme Court on the duties of the police not being debt collectors. It went further to hold liable a nominal complainant who reports civil matters to the police, for payment of damages for malicious prosecution. It is necessary for the courts to bring down the judicial hammer on this odious practice. The consequences of police involvement in civil matters are very grave for us, as a nation. The police has lost capacity for intelligence gathering, for thorough investigation that may lead to the detection and prevention of crime and the zeal for cracking major crimes is dwindling. Due also to poor remuneration and lack of motivation, it is easy for policemen to jump at land matters, breach of contract, loan default, etc. Officially, in all recovery cases, the police is entitled to ten per cent of the total sum recovered. Many lawyers don't earn as much for their cases, which will involve complicated trials and intellectual rigours. As happened in *Kure's* case, many complainants prefer to use the law

enforcement agencies to recover loans and other financial obligations, given the delay of cases in court. Moreover, the police have their own peculiar ways of forcing debtors to pay. The dangers of this are legion. First, it is a total distraction from the core duties of the police of crime detection and prevention. In almost all parts of Nigeria presently, the army has taken over the primary roles of the police due to the latter's apparent inefficiency. We have several military formations and operations tackling insurgents, armed robbers, kidnappers and other criminals, which should ordinarily be the responsibility of the police. Second, it is not proper for police officers to dabble into adjudication of disputes, for which they are not properly trained or have the requisite qualifications. We cannot have a situation whereby police officers go into the technical issues of determination of ownership of land, for instance. Third, undue exposure of police in debt recovery will lead to rise in crime and criminalities. Who would want to keep running after criminals when he could simply recover ten million naira and pocket ten per cent thereof? Generally on paper, the duties of the police are stated in Section 4 of the Police Act as being "... employed for the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are

directly charged, and shall perform such military duties within or outside Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of this or any other Act." It is crystal clear that the operating word for the police in Nigeria is "crime," which when used interchangeably with "offence", is any conduct defined as such by any law, as either a felony, a misdemeanor or a simple offence. In reality, however, a "crime" is what the policeman on duty terms it to be, even if it is a rival claim of ownership of land, a failed business contract, a landlord and tenant dispute, or simple husband and wife domestic quarrels. What this has done is to derail the police in terms of effectiveness in the discharge of its core mandate of crime prevention and control. Now the motto of the Nigeria Police is "Police is Your Friend," by which it is expected that every citizen should trust and relate with the police on any issue within their jurisdiction, although this is not so in practice.

The police is your friend as a complainant when you are still cooperating to fund their operations, to provide necessary logistics that will lead to the apprehension of the accused person, but once the accused person has been identified, God help you if he is more loaded than you are, as the police will suddenly become your "enemy," when your investigating police officer suddenly stops picking your calls and you have to wait for him in the station for hours on end. Section 8 (2) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015 is so very clear that "a suspect shall not be arrested merely on a civil wrong or breach of contract." This is what the Supreme Court has reinforced in *Kure's* case, by sounding the note of warning to all authors of frivolous petitions to brace up to be damnified in punitive damages for turning civil complaints into criminal matters. It is understandable that the police lack proper training and motivation, such that in most cases, what we have is simply working to the answer. The best mode of gathering intelligence for the police is brutality, excessive force, cruelty and torture. We therefore make the case for proper funding and training for the police and other law enforcement agencies, but while we are at that, let it be known that on no account should any citizen suffer criminal prosecution for civil wrongs. Should the Supreme Court have another opportunity to decide a similar case as *Kure supra*, I do suggest that all policemen involved in criminalizing civil grievances should also be held liable in damages, as a form of deterrence.

***We cannot have a situation whereby police officers go into the technical issues of determination of ownership of land, for instance. Third, undue exposure of police in debt recovery will lead to rise in crime and criminalities. Who would want to keep running after criminals when he could simply recover ten million naira and pocket ten per***

# News

## South African man who killed and buried his wife under bathtub bags life imprisonment

A 45-year-old man, Yibanathi MacGyver Ndema, has been sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of his wife, Noluvuyo Nonkwelo, in South Africa.

Ndema was jailed on Wednesday, December 13, 2023, in the Eastern Cape High Court in Mthatha.

Noluvuyo's remains were found buried under a bathtub in their marital home in the Zingqayi area in the district of Butterworth.

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) Regional Spokesperson, Eastern Cape Division, Luxolo Tyali, in a statement, said Ndema murdered his wife on July 1, 2019, and reported her missing for two days even though he knew that that was not true.

"The court further sentenced Ndema to five years on a charge of acts with in-

tent to defeat the course of justice. He was sentenced to two years on each of the three counts of assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, suspended for five years. The court declared him unfit to possess a firearm," the spokesperson said.

"Delivering the sentence, Judge Buyiswa Majiki, directed the children of the couple to continue receiving trauma counselling as they were left traumatized by the murder of their mother by their father, whom they used to trust and love.

"She revealed that Ndema continues to contact them telephonically, while in custody. She agreed with the prosecution that the prevalence of crimes of this nature in the whole country calls for expressly punitive sentences.

"Ndema, murdered his wife, Noluvuyo Nonkwelo (36), on 01 July 2019. On 03

July 2019, he reported his wife as a missing person to the police, even though he knew that was not true.

"The marriage had been marred by domestic abuse, with the court convicting Ndema of the 18 September 2018, 22 January and 27 June 2019, assaults on his wife.

"The assaults were by a stick, clenched fists, open hands, burning her with hot water and pulling her with her hair."

While still alive, the deceased once opened a case of assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm against him and was granted a protection order in January 2019. But both the case and the protection order were later withdrawn.

Ndema was arrested in August 2021, after Nonkwelo's remains were found buried underneath a bathtub, in the bathroom of the house

the couple shared.

The couple's children alerted their grandparents that since their mother's disappearance, the bathtub had been repositioned. That prompted the police to search Ndema's home, leading to the discovery of the remains.

DNA results confirmed that the remains were indeed those of Nonkwelo and were released to her family for proper burial.

Postmortem results revealed that the deceased died because of a fractured neck. Ndema initially abandoned bail, but at a later stage, he made a U-turn and applied for bail, which was successfully opposed by the prosecution.

During the trial, he pleaded not guilty. He also distanced himself from a confession he made to the police admitting that he had strangled his wife

to death because she was having an extramarital affair, necessitating a trial-within-a-trial.

The court ultimately admitted the confession, together with the disputed pointing-outs. After securing the conviction of Ndema,

Senior State Advocate Sibusiso Noluthungu prayed for the court to impose a life sentence and the court agreed.

Eastern Cape Director of Public Prosecutions Barry Madolo commended the sterling work of the prosecutor and the investigating team.

He particularly appreciated the role played by the father of the deceased in assisting the investigations, which led to the discovery of the remains, as well as his testimony during the trial.

## Ebonyi PoS operators express worry over naira scarcity, call for CBN intervention

The Point of Sale (PoS) operators in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, have expressed concern over the current naira scarcity, calling on the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), to intervene to save their business from collapsing.

In separate interviews on Wednesday in Abakaliki, they blamed the scarcity on banks' "refusal to release enough money". The charge for withdrawal of between N1,000 and N5,000 at PoS is now N200 as against the normal charge of N100, while the charge for N10,000 is N300 as against N200. Chinwe Okezie, PoS Operator along Mile 50 Layout, said they are paying more than what they used to pay before they could get cash from the bank. According to Mr Okezie, the high charge is borne out of greed.

"The situation is biting harder on us than you customers, believe me. If we continue to charge the usual amount, many of us will not stay in the business," he stated. Another operator, Chidi Okafor, whose shop is along Kpirikpiri in Abakaliki, said the situation was worrisome.

He called for the immediate intervention of the CBN. "This issue of cash scarcity is caused by the banks. When you go to the bank and request for N500, 000, what you will be given will be either N100,000 or N150,000.

There are added charges too. So, you see the challenges. "Many of the Automated Teller Machines, (ATMs) are not even dispensing cash. The few ones in some banks that are dispensing will give you N10,000 at the most," Mr Okafor added.

## Israeli MP stresses need to eradicate Hamas amid UN criticism

Amid mounting international criticism of the ongoing conflict in Gaza, Israeli Member of Parliament Sharren Haskel, representing the National Unity Party, issued a defiant response, emphasising the importance of Israel's goal to eradicate Hamas. Haskel stated that the leadership of Hamas has consistently expressed intentions to persecute and harm Jews, making the conflict a matter of self-defence for Israel.

"Their leadership have said time and time again that they will always persecute the Jews and try to murder them if they have any kind of opportunity," said Haskel, justifying Israel's actions as a means to defend its children and ensure peace within the country.

The comments come in the wake of US President Joe Biden expressing concern over Israel's "indiscriminate bombing" in Gaza and growing global support for a ceasefire. White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan is set to visit Israel, where discussions with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli war cabinet are expected to address the conduct of the conflict.

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President Biden's criticism and calls for more targeted strikes have fueled speculation about a potential shift in Israel's military strategy. Sullivan, on his diplomatic tour, also held talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, aiming to restart negotiations for normalising relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.



Late Noluvuyo Nonkwelo.



MacGyver Ndema

## Soludo commended for pace of development in Awka

The Governor of Anambra State, Prof Chukwuma Soludo, has been commended for the pace of development going on in Awka Capital City.

Managing Director of Think Home Developers and Realtors Limited, Mr Machiavelli Chidi Okafor and other real estate developers, gave the testimony during the groundbreaking ceremony of Oakville Millennium City Estate, Awka.

Okafor said: "Mr Governor, your government is the only government that that has picked a keen interest in giving Awka a befitting state capital which they will be proud of.

"The new government house, the solution fun city 2.0, and numerous other projects. Your road infrastructure that traverses the length and breadth of the state are a testament to your vision for Anambra State." Oka-

for said the capacity that the governor has demonstrated is the reason he decided to heed the think-home call of the governor for indigenes to invest at home.

"Anambra people are contributing 30% of housing development in the entire Nigeria, and because of the governor's call, I have come home to provide the solution I have provided in Lagos and Abuja, down here."

He added: "Today's event is a response to that call for Anambra people to invest at home, and I know that our people abroad are also putting resources together to invest at home.

"By the time you are done with your eight years tenure, Anambra would have become the state we all dreamt of. This estate, Oakville is in line with your vision to create a smart city, where our people will love and desire to stay."

Governor Soludo, who was represented by his Chief of Staff, Mr Ernest Ezeajughu said: "While people are giving excuses, Oakville is here investing and expanding. We will end urge more of our people to come here and invest.

"We are asking that others should borrow a leaf and do

same. Our dream of a livable smart mega city is working. Soludo working day and night to ensure completion of the new government house and before long the governor will leave Amawbia for Awka for a permanent government house and governor's lodge."

## YPP Abia sacks Chairman for accepting SSA job in LGA

The Young Progressive Party (YPP), Abia State chapter has suspended its Chairman, Uluocha Nelccin Chimezuu for allegedly engaging in anti-party activities, replacing him with Mr Uzodinma Nwoko as the acting Chairman cum Secretary, pending another congress of the party.

In a communique issued at the party's secretariat at 75 Aba Road in Umuahia, members of the State Working Committee (SWC) of the

YPP said it suspended the former Chairman, Uluocha Nelccin Chimezuu from the party for alleged anti-party activities before and during the 2023 general elections.

The motion for the suspension of the party Chairman and the vote of no confidence in him was moved by Success Echefulua and seconded by Nwakanma Douglas during the SWC meeting.

The party said it was unacceptable for the suspended YPP Chairman to accept to

become the Senior Special Assistant (SSA) on Revenue Service Mobilization to the Chairman of Umuahia North LGA, Victor Ikeji.

The party, which said it notified the national secretariat of the SWC's decision, explained that Uluocha Nelccin Chimezuu could no longer function as the party Chairman for picking up the SSA job. It added that the suspended Chairman contravened Section 31.14 and Article 31, of the YPP constitution.

# News

## Enugu community takes anti-kidnapping fight to deities

Following the increased kidnapping and other criminal activities in Enugu-Ezike communities in Igboeze North Local Government Area of Enugu State, the people of the area have invoked their deities and ancestors against perpetrators of the heinous acts.

Enugu-Ezike, known for herbal practices and traditional worships, recently became a home to criminals, including unknown gunmen, kidnapers, ritualists, and rapists. But, last Wednesday, one Igwe Stone and other prominent sons of the town gathered in the community, where they performed the ritual and rained curses against those that have made Enugu-Ezike, also known for palm-wine production, a dreaded place.

The community constitutes the largest LGA in Enugu State. The invocation was also rained on persons

involved in witchcraft, swindling, destiny snatching, among others in the area.

The event was witnessed by a large turnout of natives. It was held at Ogrute roundabout, near the council headquarters. Prominent natives of the multi-autonomous communities include Senator Ayogu Eze, Amb Fidel Ayogu, Chief Emeka Mama, Hon Simon Atigwe, and Hon Dennis Agbo. Meanwhile, the Enugu State police command has advised travellers in the state and other Nigerians to plan for the Yuletide's travels and expenditures.

The Public Relations Officer of the Enugu State Police Command, Daniel Ndukwe, who gave the warning in a statement on his X handle, also warned against night travels. Ndukwe asked travellers to travel through a known transportation company, while ensuring they register their details on the

manifest.

"If you travel by public transport, ensure you travel through a known transportation company. 'Don't forget to record your name and details on the travel manifest and send details of the vehicle you travel in to a loved one,' he said.

To those travelling in their private vehicles, Ndukwe charged them to ensure such vehicles are properly serviced and maintained. "Except extremely unavoidable, avoid night travels, don't travel through unfamiliar paths, as much as possible, get a security travel advisory on the path you travel and on your destination," he advised.

The police spokesman enjoined the people to be

prudent and not profligate as they celebrate. "Don't overspend and end up selling off your property just to raise funds to start life again, thereby blaming 'village people'.

Don't do things to impress or oppress anyone. celebrate moderately, as you travel, make sure you lock up and secure the home you're leaving behind, so you don't come back to meet a burgled home.

"Ensure you've got the number of the Police Command you're traveling to and the ones you'll pass through in case of a security emergency. 'Lastly, plan, plan, and plan your yuletide again. Do everything in moderation,' he admonished.

## Troops raid IPOB/ESN camps in Anambra

Troops of Exercise GOLDEN DAWN III in conjunction with personnel of the Nigerian Navy, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and local vigilante operatives on Monday, acting on timely and credible intelligence raided camps of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed affiliates the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in Orsumoghu general area of Anambra State.

During the raid operations the troops cleared and destroyed IPOB/ESN camps. One of the terrorist was naturalized while others escaped with gunshot wounds and one pump action rifle was recovered.

Similarly, on Saturday 9 December 2023, troops on patrol along Orsumoghu ~

Ukpor road in Ihiala Local Government Area came in contact with the irredentist.

Authorities report that due to superior fire power the criminals were forced to abandon their location. Items recovered includes, 27 rounds of 7.62 x 51mm ammunition, 3 locally made hand grenade, 2 handheld radios, one pair of NPF uniform and fragmental jacket and charms.

It could be recalled that Exercise GOLDEN DAWN III was recently flagged off in the South East region to complement the security architecture of the region during and after the yuletide period.

The General Officer Commanding 82 Division Nigerian Army, Major General Hassan Taiwo Dada therefore wishes to enjoin members of the public to support the Nigerian Army and other security agencies with credible information through the Emergency Telephone Line 193 to enhance the fight against terrorism and other criminal activities.

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## IPOB in error by involving Nwifuru in Kanu's indictment - Ohanaeze

The apex Igbo socio-cultural organization, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, has said that the governor of Ebonyi State, Francis Nwifuru is not involved in any plot trying to stop the release of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) leader, Nnamdi Kanu.

The group noted that the Ebonyi governor is a committed Igbo political leader who would not work against the possible release of Kanu. Recall that IPOB had released some names of top Igbo politicians working against Kanu's release and Nwifuru was named among the perpetrators of the plot.

However, the factional Secretary-General of Ohanaeze, Okechukwu Isiguzoro, said indicting Nwifuru was a costly mistake. A statement by Isiguzoro reads: "Our attention is drawn to the indictments by IPOB that some highly placed political elites have been holding clandestine and nocturnal meetings against the possible release

of Nnamdi Kanu.

"However, we are certain that Rt. Hon. Francis Ogbonna Nwifuru, the Executive Governor of Ebonyi State, is not involved in this plot.

"There must be a mix-up somewhere, and we believe it's a costly mistake to get an innocent man involved in this indictment."

"While the organisation clarifies that they do not speak on behalf of the Governor of Ebonyi, they believe that it is the responsibility of Igbo leadership to exonerate an innocent man whose name may have been wrongly implicated.

"We assure IPOB that Governor Nwifuru remains concerned about the welfare and well-being of residents and indigenous people of Ebonyi State. "Governor Francis Nwifuru's commitment to serving his people and driving development in Ebonyi State has been widely recognised, and Ohanaeze Ndigbo stands behind his integrity and leadership."

## Fresh COVID-19 case detected in Benue - WHO

The World Health Organization [WHO] in Benue State has confirmed that 25 persons have tested positive for COVID-19 disease according to the WHO's Surveillance Officer for the state.

Speaking to journalists at a CSOs and Media Engagement Meeting on the ramp-up of the virus in Makurdi, Okechukwu Chigbo the surveillance officer said that the disease is still widespread and urged Nigerians to pro-

tect themselves from it by getting vaccinated. She added that the country is currently at the peak of the virus' activity, so it is important for Nigerians to make use of the available vaccines to contain the virus.

Chigbo said the vaccines were safe and would prevent Nigerians from contracting serious infections caused by the disease. *News Echo* recalls that the virus was first reported in Nigeria on 27 February 2020.



Poultry Farmers receiving birds, feeds from AAC and others in Owerri.

## United Nigeria Airlines commence flight operations to Sokoto, Kano States

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

On December 13, 2023, United Nigeria Airlines, the fastest-growing indigenous airline, achieved a significant milestone by launching inaugural flights to Sadiq Abubakar International Airport in Sokoto and Mallam Aminu Kano International Airport in Kano State.

The maiden flight, operated with the airline's Airbus A320, flew esteemed dignitaries and air travelers as its first passengers. Among the passengers were Professor Obiora Okonkwo, OFR, Chairman of United Nigeria; Governor Ahmadu Aliyu Sokoto; Dr. Linus Awute, Director of Administration, UNA; former Nigerian Ambassador to Spain, Iyom Bianca Odumegwu-Ojukwu; former managing director of the Anambra broadcasting service, Chief Uche Nworah, PhD; and traditional rulers, among others.

The UNA Airbus A320 departed from Abuja, landing first at Sadiq Abubakar

International Airport in Sokoto. The United Nigeria team, led by the Chairman, Professor Okonkwo, paid a courtesy call to the Palace of the Sultan of Sokoto, who warmly received them, showering praise and offering royal blessings.

The team was later hosted to a luncheon at the state house by Executive Governor of Sokoto State, Ahmadu Aliyu Sokoto before returning to Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja. Following the successful flight to and from Sokoto State, passengers destined for Kano State boarded United Nigeria flight U50576.

With Professor Okonkwo and his team on board, the UNA flight touched down at Mallam Aminu Kano International Airport at about 21:00 hrs. from Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, marking a historic moment for United Nigeria and the people of Kano State. As part of the inaugural flight commemoration, the Emir of Kano, Aminu Ado Bayero, joined Professor Okonkwo and his

team on the UNA flight back to Abuja after a courtesy visit, a warm reception, and dinner at the Emir's Giadam Rumfa palace, in Kano State.

## One of 27 Rivers Lawmakers makes returns to PDP

Hon. Linda Somari Stewart, one of the 27 Rivers State House of Assembly members who defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC) has reportedly made a U-turn.

She returned to her party, the Peoples Democratic Party after her seat and that of others were declared vacant. Recall that on Monday, 27 members of the House of Assembly said to be loyal to the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory and immediate governor of the state, Nyesom Wike, defected from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the APC.

The lawmakers announced their defection at the plenary, citing division in the PDP as the reason for the move. Stewart, the lawmaker representing Okrika in the State

Assembly "made a U-turn as the seats of the defectors were about to be declared vacant". Her defection means Stewart has moved from Wike's camp to Governor Siminalayi Fubara's camp. On Wednesday that a five-member faction of the State House of Assembly headed by Edison Ehie and loyal to Governor Fubara had passed the 2024 budget proposal submitted by the governor.

The State Executive Council, on Monday, approved the estimated budget of over N800 billion, tagged by the governor as the 'Budget of Renewed Hope, Consolidation, and Continuity' for the 2024 fiscal year. The faction on Wednesday moved the house plenary session to the Government House, Port Harcourt.

## Controversy

# Rivers Power-Play: Wike versus Fubara

## ...Fubara Presents 2024 State Budget to Ehie-led Assembly

## ... As State Attorney General, Adangor Resigns

The Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara on Wednesday presented the state's N800bn 2024 budget proposals to the State House of Assembly, tagged 'Budget of Renewed Hope, Consolidation and Continuity', the Rivers State Executive Council had earlier approved the budget estimates.

The Governor presented the budget to the Ehie-led Assembly of lawmakers sitting within the premises of the Rivers State government house following the earlier demolition of the State Assembly Complex. The 5-man assembly was presided over by Edison Ehie who was on Tuesday backed by a ruling of the Rivers State High Court as the authentic Speaker of the State Assembly.

Before the arrival of Fubara, the Speaker had declared the seats of all 27 lawmakers who recently defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC) vacant in line with section 109 (1) and (2) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended.

"Distinguished colleagues, the House will duly inform INEC of the vacancies in the Rivers State House of Assembly and indeed conduct a fresh election to fill the above vacancies," Mr Ehie said on Wednesday's sitting after reading the names of the affected lawmakers

Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State has revealed why the State House of Assembly complex was demolished on Wednesday morning following Professional advice on the structural integrity of the building which was hit with explosives.

It has been earlier reported that over ten bulldozers and other heavy-duty equipment were rolled out for the demolition of the House of Assembly complex as early as 5 a.m. on Wednesday.

Speaking on the demolition, the Commissioner for Information and Communication, Joseph Johnson, stated that the decision to demolish and rebuild the Rivers State House of Assembly Complex was due to the structural defects which arose mainly as a result of the recent explosion and fire incident which rendered the main building unfit for human use.

He said after the visit of the Governor to inspect the level of damage done to the building on the day of the fire incident, it became necessary to invite professionals to advise the government on the integrity of the building.

Meanwhile, Professor Zacchaeus Adangor, SAN, the Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice in Rivers state, has officially resigned from his position.

The resignation notice was contained in an official letter addressed to Governor Siminalayi Fubara and personally signed by the erstwhile Attorney General, citing "personal reasons" as the primary reason for the decision.

Prof. Adangor was amongst the A-list Commissioners on former Governor Nyesom Wike's hierarchy of appointees and was amongst the very first set of Commissioners appointed into Governor Siminalayi Fubara's administration. He has remained a trusted and loyal ally of the now FCT Minister, thus making his position in the Rivers Executive Council quite uncomfortable and eventually untenable in the wake and escalation of the political brouhaha between the Rivers Governor and the FCT Minister.



Wike



Fubara

However, Mr. Tony Okocha, the state APC Caretaker Committee Chairman, said in a statement in Port Harcourt that the action was unconstitutional.

Okocha said that Section 120(2) of the Constitution clearly stated that no money shall be spent except it was appropriated by the state House of Assembly. "The presentation of a bill to 4 suspended members of the House of Assembly does not fulfill the requirements of the constitution for all the reasons stated," he said. Okocha cautioned that expenditure made by the state government on the outcome of such presentation was clearly an infringement on the constitution and as such sufficient grounds to commence impeachment. He also said that Section 92(2) C prescribed that a Speaker can be removed by two third majority of the House of Assembly. "Amaewhule remains the speaker of the House of Assembly, the lawmakers passed a vote of confidence on him," he said. Okocha also said that Section 96(1) of the constitution clearly stated that the quorum of the House of Assembly shall be one-third of all members. "One-third of 31 minus the deceased member is clearly 11 as such four members can never form a quorum. Meanwhile, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on Wednesday said it has "formally" informed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of the 25 vacant seats in the Rivers House of Assembly. The 27 lawmakers said to be loyal to the immediate past governor of the state, Nyesom Wike, dumped the party on Monday for the All Progressives Congress (APC). However, two of the lawmakers were said to have returned to the PDP. A day after, the PDP asked Edison Ehie, speaker of the Rivers assembly, to declare the lawmakers' seats vacant immediately. The party National Working Committee (NWC) in a statement asked the electoral body to conduct elections in the affected constituencies. The party premised its demand on section 109 (1) of the constitution which provides grounds upon which a lawmaker can lose

his seat in the parliament. It said after its meeting on Wednesday, the affairs in Rivers were "thoroughly reviewed" and some resolutions were reached.

"That the Party communicates to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) by formally informing the Commission of the vacancies in the Rivers State House of Assembly as a result of the defection of the 25 now former members, who by virtue of Section 109 (1) (g) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) vacated their seats by their action," the statement reads. "That the Party officially demand that INEC should within the Constitutionally stipulated time, conduct fresh election in the 25 State Constituencies in Rivers State where vacancies now exist in the Rivers State House of Assembly as a result of the defection of the 25 now former members. "Direct the National Legal Adviser to commence appropriate legal action with respect to the declaration of the seats of the 25 defected former members vacant and the conduct of fresh election into the 25 State Constituencies in Rivers State in accordance with the provision of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)." According to the PDP, "every step necessary available in a democracy to ensure that the votes and mandate of the people of the 25 State Constituencies in Rivers State are protected and not appropriated under any circumstance whatsoever". In an interesting twist to the ongoing political crisis in Rivers State, the Martins Amaewhule-led Rivers State House of Assembly convened a sitting on Thursday, some 24 hours after Governor Siminalayi Fubara led the demolition of the Assembly Complex on Moscow Road. The Amaewhule group held a plenary session at the auditorium of the Assembly Quarters on Aba Road despite a restraining court order. The sitting by the Amaewhule group came just a day after the five-man group led by Edison Ehie declared vacant, 27 seats of lawmakers in the Amaewhule group for defecting from the Peoples Democratic

Party (PDP) to the All Progressives Congress (APC). During Thursday's plenary by the Amaewhule group, the lawmakers condemned the demolition of the Assembly Complex by the state government. The lawmaker representing Andoni constituency, Ofiks Kagbang, moved a motion of urgent public importance condemning the demolition, and this was unanimously adopted by the House. Meanwhile, another member, Major Jack, presented the report on the Rivers State Local Government Amendment Bill to the Speaker which was adopted. The group's Speaker also said when this Bill is passed into law it'll eliminate the governor's power to dissolve Local Government Executives. In total, there were 26 lawmakers in attendance even as the group decided to use the auditorium at the Assembly Quarters for their legislative sittings for now.

On another breathe, the federal government has distanced itself from the ongoing political crisis in Rivers State involving the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, his loyalists and Governor Siminalayi Fubara, saying the former governor's position is not that of government at the centre. Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, made this known to newsmen after briefing on the outcomes of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) at the State House in Abuja. According to him, the federal government knows nothing about the political crisis which has seen the FCT minister and members of the Rivers State House of Assembly at war against Governor Fubara. On account of the crisis, 27 of the lawmakers had on Tuesday announced their defection from the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the state to the All Progressives Congress (APC) leading to their seats being declared vacant by the Legislature. Asked whether the federal government shared Wike's position on the matter as a member of the federal cabinet, the Information Minister said: "Well, he is a federal cabinet member; he is involved in the situation in the state. That cannot be a federal government position. How can it be the federal government's position?" Idris stressed that the federal government is keen to ensure peace and tranquility in every part of the country including Rivers, saying: "Well, the federal government is always interested in the well being of all the states, and in that direction the federal government will always align with everyone in Nigeria to make sure that there is peace and tranquility in all parts of this country. Commenting on the allegation raised by Asari Dokubo, accusing President Bola Tinubu of ignoring the festering crisis in Rivers State, the Minister noted that what the leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force said is only advisory. According to him: "I saw Asari Dokubo's message. It was an advisory. He made an advisory. And when you make an advisory, you allow time to see whether the person you have given the advice will look at it again and come back to you. That does not suggest anything. That doesn't suggest that the federal government created that problem. It was never a creation of the federal government. It is a creation of the political situation in River State."

## Special Report

# Uzodimma Presents N592bn Budget For 2024 Fiscal year

## ...Tagged "Budget of Renewed Economic Growth"

By Udochukwu Chukwu

The Imo State Governor, Senator Hope Uzodimma, on Tuesday, presented his 2024 Appropriation Bill of N592, 234,594,176 to the Imo State House of Assembly, for its consideration and expeditious passage into law. Tagged "Budget of Renewed Economic Growth," Governor Uzodimma said that the bill is at the heart of the consolidation of the economic gains already recorded during the first term of his administration, and aligning the economic growth of Imo State with his 10-year development plan. He said: "It is significant in the sense that we are commencing the fiscal transition from one administration to another with the same captain. It is all to the glory of God. So, as I stand in these hallowed chambers today, I feel a sense of history unfolding. "The budget proposal is for the first fiscal year of the first year of my second tenure in office as the democratically elected governor of Imo State. That is unique indeed. The 10th assembly that will consider the budget for approval is also a brand-new assembly of vibrant and committed young legislators elected by our people to pilot the affairs of the legislature for the next four years. This is also remarkable.

"Mr. Speaker, honourable members, it is, therefore, with great pleasure, in furtherance of my constitutional responsibilities as the governor of Imo State, that I am here today to place before you the draft proposals of the 2024 budget. "In the past four years, my administration has worked relentlessly to address the myriads of challenges that we met on the ground when I assumed office as the governor of Imo State on January 15th, 2020. "The challenges were enormous and cut across virtually all sectors; from dilapidated infrastructure to frightening youth unemployment, from decayed education to a failed health system, and from a crippled civil service to a public sector that was swimming in corruption. "The state of affairs was enough to daunt even the bravest and strongest of men. But, our strength lies neither in bravery nor courage, but rather in well-grounded vision and mission by the grace of God. "Mr. Speaker, honourable members, I am glad to report to you that in the past four years, through our now famous 3R mantra of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Recovery, we have been able to tackle and reasonably arrest these challenges. "Pointers to this can be found in our famed and very successful programmes of infrastructure revolution, massive human capital development, the total rejuvenation and automation of the public service which has drastically reduced public service corruption and other laudable interventions in the health, education and social services sectors. "Mr. Speaker, honourable members, with what we have achieved so far, there is no doubt that the last four years have been used to lay a solid foundation for the economic growth and development of Imo State. "As a result, all macroeconomic indicators clearly show that Imo State is now positioned for accelerated growth and development. This is why I have themed the 2024 budget estimates as 'Budget of Renewed Economic Growth.'"

Uzodimma, who said that the budget is focused on the rapid economic growth of



Uzodimma

Imo State, noted that the capital expenditure for the 2024 budget is N491.2 billion while the recurrent expenditure will gulp N100.99 billion. He explained that "out of a total budget of N592.2 billion, capital expenditure will gulp 82.9 per cent of the total budget, which amounts to a capital expenditure of N491.2 billion. "Compared to the N373.6 billion budgeted for capital expenditure in the 2023 budget, the 2024 budget translates to a 32 per cent increase in capital expenditure. This is a clear indication that we are determined to stimulate and fast-track the economic growth of our dear state. "This point becomes clearer when we consider the 2024 budgetary allocation for recurrent expenditure of N100.99 billion out of which a total of N43.05 billion is provided for overhead expenditure in the 2024 budget. "This accounts for less than 10 per cent of the total budget sum. Also, compared to the figure of N48.34 Billion in 2023, the sharp decrease in the budgetary allocation for overhead expenditure stands as an unequivocal witness of our resolve to cut down on frivolous expenditure to help boost the funding of capital projects in the state.

"This is a further pointer that this administration is determined to checkmate all forms of leakage or waste of public resources. Prudent and efficient management of public funds is the new norm that cannot be compromised. As always, all capital projects must be subject to due process, routine scrutiny, and audit." Uzodimma added that his administration would ensure that every act of sabotage in the implementation of the 2024 budget would be severely sanctioned. He said: "All commissioners or heads of MDAs with their permanent secretaries or directors of Finance and Administration will henceforth be required to commit in writing and under oath, that the budgetary allocations to their MDAs shall be spent as appropriated. "As I have always emphasised, my administration has no

room for public sector corruption and graft. To this end, every public or civil servant working for this administration must do all within his or her powers to resist the lure of corruption. "The only way we can achieve the goal of advancing our economic growth is by ensuring that every kobo meant for the common good is judiciously applied for that purpose. Let me reiterate that under my watch, the task of riding Imo State of public sector corruption is one that must be accomplished. "It is also noteworthy that the budget is tailored to meet the goals of our 10-year Development Plan, which identifies the priority sectors and initiatives that will drive the growth and development of our dear State. "Indeed, earlier in the year, I commissioned a team of experts working with the state government to come up with a 10-year development plan for our dear Imo State. I did so because I understand that every prosperous and sustainable economy is built on a carefully articulated vision and plan.

"In our own case, our development plan is built around the intervention framework of our 3R mantra of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Recovery. "Moving forward, I should let you know that priority sectors, industries, and projects that will accelerate the State's economic prosperity have been identified by this plan. "The Orashi Free Trade Zone and the multiplier businesses therein are among the top sectors identified as having great potential to stimulate and accelerate the economic growth of the State. "The plan also identified how to harness our agricultural potential and mineral resources, and how to align them with the proposed establishment of ceramic industry and agro-processing facilities across the three senatorial districts of Imo State. "Consequently, therefore, and drawing from the 10-year Development Plan, emphasis is laid on economic development, human capital development, agriculture, and massive youth empowerment. "This explains why we have much of the budgetary expenditure coming

under the Economic and Social Sector Heads." He further highlighted that the focus of his administration in the preceding year of 2023 and gains recorded in all the ministries, departments and agencies to include: construction and rebuilding of critical infrastructure, municipal and social services, such as roads, bridges, water, electricity, hospitals, schools, etc. "Ensuring safety, security, and peace by tackling the hydra-headed problem of insecurity, which hitherto hindered the development of the state, boosting of Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), putting in place structures and facilities for the intensification of the drive for donor assistance/external funding through collaborations and partnerships at international, national and sub-national levels. "Enhancing effective and prudent management of public finances (this is very critical); enforcement of cost-saving measures with emphasis on value for money in the award of contracts for the construction of roads and other projects."

Others included in the area of reconstruction of major roads, Owerri capital city renewal, water and power sector, digital economy, housing and urban development, humanitarian affairs, disaster management and poverty alleviation, land administration and boundary issues, health, education, transport, grants for transparency, law and judicial reforms and general administration. The 2024 appropriation will not only exceed the gains recorded in 2023 but expectations of the people. Uzodimma explained the the profile of the 2024 budget and its thrust by noting that "the 2024 Budget code-named 'Budget of Renewed Economic Growth,' is quite unique as it will usher in the first year of my second tenure in office as the governor of Imo State. This was made possible by the special grace of Almighty God and the overwhelming support and endorsement of Imo people. "As I have always emphasised in my previous Budget Presentations to this Honourable House of Assembly, my vision of a new Imo State is predicated on economic freedom, security and shared prosperity welded into good governance. "In the year ahead, we will continue to vigorously pursue our vision under the 3R Agenda in order to consolidate our achievements and put in place the Imo of our dream where freedom, security, rule of law, justice, equity and self-actualisation of all and sundry will be guaranteed, coupled with the overall improvement in the socio-economic wellbeing of all citizens. "In this respect, the objective of the 2024 Budget has been carefully aligned to the Imo State Development Plan (2024-2034) (SDP) and the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), as well as other sectoral plans and priority initiatives. "This is to satisfy the desires of Imo people, which is to promote sustainable economic growth, development and to promote peace and prosperity. "The 2024 Budget is also aligned with the 3R Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Recovery Mantra. The following policies of government and strategies are to be deployed to realize the above mission. "They are participatory governance through open budget process; human capital development agenda (Education, Health Care Services, improved Technology and Infrastructure)."

## Arts

# Music Beyond Belief in Africa

By Leo Igwe

**M**usic beyond belief refers to irreligious music and songs, including humanist, atheist, and freethought songs. The pervasiveness of religion in Africa has made it difficult for many Africans to acknowledge, understand, or appreciate music and songs beyond the precinct of religion, faith, and belief in God. Gospel music and songs are among the most popular in Nigeria. Many artistes jostle to out-gospel one another. Many artistes are turning gospel musicians overnight. Even the so-called world musical lyrics feature invocations of God or supplications to the Supreme Being or some supernatural agents. The tragedy is that many people think or have been made to believe that religion has a monopoly on artistic expressions. Incidentally, this is not the case. Religion does not have a monopoly as popularly believed because there are musical forms and songs beyond belief. Several song tracks and lyrics speak to nonreligious, humanist, atheist, and freethought themes, principles, and values. These songs form a part of many cultures; they are found in many societies across the globe.

While irreligious songs are not mainstream, they exist and feature in the music industry. And the time has come for humanists, atheists, and freethinkers to pay closer attention to this category of music. Humanists need to reclaim their artistic legacy. In some parts of the world, humanist, atheist, and freethought songs are emerging and becoming a distinct category of music. Some humanist organizations have choir groups that render nonreligious songs. The humanist organization in the UK has a choir. The

group renders songs at its events and conferences. One of the key features at the World Humanist Congress in Copenhagen this year was a rendition by a humanist choir from Norway. The choir sang one of Bob Dylan's songs, Blowin' In The Wind. The popular freethought leader, Dan Barker, a former pastor, has inspired a secular music band in the US. His Nothing Fails like Prayer, and other songs are played at freethought meetings and conventions. The German song about freedom of thought, Die Gedanken sind frei, is played at atheist meetings and conventions. So, music and songs beyond belief are growing globally. It has become necessary for humanists from Nigeria and, nay Africa to explore the potentials and possibilities of music beyond belief. This exploration is important because music and songs nourish the heart and mind. Music is an effective way of sending and spreading a message. Music is an aspect of African culture. Africa has been described as the land of the drums. This is the time to get the world to know and hear the sounds from the continent's musical drums beyond belief.

A closer look at the musical field in Nigeria reveals the existence, expression, and manifestation of lyrics and songs that speak to nonreligious, irreligious, and religion-critical outlooks. One that quickly comes to mind is Fela Kuti's Coffin for the Head of State. Fela Kuti used this piece of music to highlight the hypocrisy and double standard of religious Christians and Muslims, especially those who are in power. He described Christianity and Islam as moneymaking organizations and noted the contradictions in the lives of Christian and Muslim clerics whom he said exploited the

gullibility of their followers. Another piece of irreligious music that comes to mind is Femi's Wonder Wonder Wonder. In line with his father's Coffin for the Head of State, Femi noted the confusion that Christians and Muslims were causing, the religious wars that their fanatics waged, and the tendency of clerics to enjoy life at the expense of their members. Other irreligious lyrics and songs exist in English and in local languages. Humanists in Nigeria need to discover these cultural goods. Humanists need to explore ways of enriching the country's irreligious musical culture. And one way to do this is to celebrate the country's irreligious music and musicians.

African humanists should play freethought songs at meetings and conventions. There should be annual or biennial events to celebrate Africa's irreligious musical legends. Humanists who can sing should

form a humanist choir or a music band. There are many humanists waiting to show their talents. Humanist and atheist songwriters should work and come up with lyrics that highlight irreligious views and ideals. Humanists and atheists often criticize religion or highlight the absurdities of god belief. And music could be an effective tool to achieve this goal. Humanist and atheist associations should consider organizing beyond-belief musical festivals. They should stage irreligious musical talent hunts in schools, colleges, and universities and help young humanists and non-humanists, as the case may be, realize their artistic gifts. Humanists should commit to furthering and promoting music and songs beyond belief in Africa.

Igwe is a board member of Humanists International, UK.

*(A closer look at the musical field in Nigeria reveals the existence, expression, and manifestation of lyrics and songs that speak to nonreligious, irreligious, and religion-critical outlooks.)*

## Issues

# Money Politics in Nigeria: Analysing Consequences therein

By Justice Nwabueze Ijeoma

**M**oney politics is a system where members of the political class induce potential voters with monetary gifts and items during electioneering campaigns. Toun Ogunbiyi, June 7, 2022, Money Politics and the Nigeria Economy, Business Day, explained money politics to be "a system in which a politician is being supported by its party members in return for financial support". By this system, the ordinary people who are supposed to be the greatest beneficiary of good governance become the greatest losers and live in abject poverty and total neglect by the government because the ones in government believe they got their votes in exchange of monetary gifts. These politicians return to the grassroots at the beginning of every electioneering year with gifts and items to entice the ordinary people; and the cycle continues. The cost of running for an elective position in Nigeria is so huge that it has become the exclusive reserve of the rich and wealthy. On April 21, 2022, Premium Times reported that the cost of presidential expression of interest form for the People's Democratic Party was #40m. This is excluding the money used for state-to-state campaigns, incentives for party delegates before the primary election which

determines the standard bearer, the popular "stomach infrastructure" which comes in the form of distribution of food items to the lower class. This by implication, means that anybody can now be elected to power, as far as you have the money to spend; it does not matter if you are qualified or not. Consequently, leaders fail to carry out their campaign promises once they occupy the position of power. To them, being in a position of power has become a call to be served rather than a call to serve. According to the report by the UK's The Guardian, "elections in Nigeria translate to heavy spending to secure seats or pay off rivals". So, Nigeria continues to find itself within the cycle of debt trap, poverty, and inequality because of the expensive system of government where the success of a political party and candidate largely depends on the ability to settle those believed to be political godfathers or cabals. Whatever is done before and after the election is seen to be an investment that will return profit. Traveling round Nigeria will afford one the opportunity to see and understand the impact of money politics in the country. Failed billion Naira projects all over the country; for instance, the Ajaokuta Steel Company has been unproductive, yet

the government use it to siphon public funds by allocating money to the company. Punch newspapers in October 2021 reported that the federal government allocated #4.2bn to the moribund Ajaokuta steel company. The voice of Nigeria in November 2022 reported that in the proposed 2023 budget, the sum of #3.58bn was allocated to the company to cover personnel cost. One would wonder why huge sums are allocated yearly to a moribund project. Today, December 12, 2023, Premium Times reported that The Senate of the federal Republic of Nigeria

constituted an adhoc committee to investigate all contracts awarded for the rehabilitation of the four moribund refineries in the country. The senate noted that despite the moribund state of the nation's four refineries, their operating costs between the year 2010 and year 2020 were estimated at #4.8 trillion Naira. These failures can only happen where the leaders of a country lack the capacity to lead and manage the resources but have the financial power to bulldoze their way to power. In all of these, the ordinary man continues to suffer.

*(These failures can only happen where the leaders of a country lack the capacity to lead and manage the resources but have the financial power to bulldoze their way to power. In all of these, the ordinary man continues to suffer.)*



## A Night of Queens, celebrating female music icons in Nigeria



The diverse and vibrant sounds of Nigerian music can be linked to the unique and talented individuals in the country each contributing their one-of-a-kind melodies and rhythms to the nation's rich cultural heritage.

Although the music industry has been mostly male-dominated, women have played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of music genres, leaving an indelible mark on the industry.

In the early 60s and 70s, women in the music industry faced numerous barriers, often being relegated to the role of backing vocalists or performers of traditional folk music. A few trailblazing women defied these limitations, breaking through societal norms and establishing themselves as formidable forces in the male-dominated music scene. Some of the pioneers include; Nelly Uchendu, the Lijadu sisters, Veno, Christy Essien-Igbokwe, Evi Edna Ogholi and Onyeka Onwenu.

Onyeka Onwenu, a singer, songwriter, actress, and activist who rose to prominence in the 1970s with her powerful vocals and captivating stage presence, fused traditional Nigerian rhythms with contemporary sounds, becoming a symbol of fe-

male empowerment and cultural pride.

In the early 2000s, a new wave of female Afrobeats singers emerged, carrying the light of their predecessors while infusing fresh energy and perspectives into the genre. These women challenged and are still challenging stereotypes, redefining the role of women in music, and captivating audiences with their unique blend of musical styles.

The rise of female Afrobeats musicians has had a profound impact on the Nigerian music industry and beyond. These women are not only breaking down gender barriers but also showcasing the diversity and creativity of Nigerian music to a global audience. Their success is inspiring a new generation of female musicians and challenging traditional gender roles in the industry.

Some of the leading voices in this movement are; Tiwa Savage, Yemi Alade, Waje, Simi, Niniola, and Teni, amongst many others. Their contributions to Nigerian music history are undeniable. From the early trailblazers like Onyeka Onwenu and Christy Essien-Igbokwe to the contemporary stars like Tiwa Savage and Yemi Alade, women have consistently pushed boundaries,

redefined genres, and captivated audiences with their talent and artistry. As the Nigerian music scene continues to evolve, it is imperative to recognise and celebrate the transformative impact of female artists, who are shaping the future of music and inspiring generations to come.

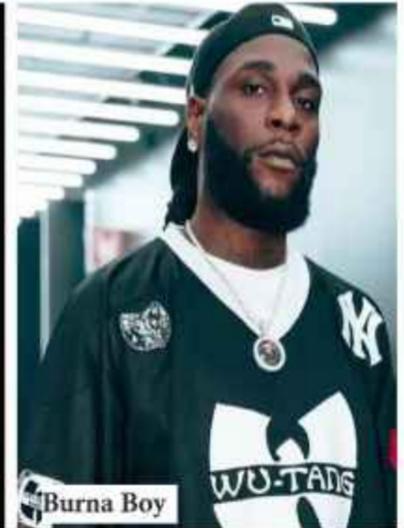
To celebrate female excellence and as a testament to the groundbreaking achievements of these remarkable artists, Livewire Concerts, an international entertainment company in Nigeria, is launching its flagship all-female concert in Nigeria on December 17, 2023.

Themed "A Night of Queens", the concert will have an all-female lineup take the stage, featuring, Tiwa Savage, Teni, Simi, Waje, Niniola, Yemi Alade, Ms DSF, and more, highlighting the incredible talent and diversity of Nigeria's female music scene.

Sponsored by First Bank of Nigeria, Bet Naija, and Pepsi, A Night of Queens promises an unforgettable experience for the audience. The electrifying performances, infectious excitement, and profound sense of community that these exceptional women bring to the stage will captivate and inspire everyone present.



Rema



Burna Boy

## REMA & BURNA BOY LEAD SPOTIFY'S TOP EXPORTED ARTISTS FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

A new generation of artists is leading the global exportation of Nigerian music. These musical trailblazers are taking traditional sounds and injecting them with contemporary beats, creating an irresistible fusion that's captivating audiences worldwide. They aren't just making waves within Africa; they're breaking down barriers and teaming up with international superstars.

It's a cross-cultural dialogue that's transcending borders and sparking a worldwide love affair with African music. Spotify Wrapped data for 2023 reveals the undeniable growing influence of African artists across the globe, with African music witnessing a 26% year-on-year increase in plays outside the continent.

Given how significant a force Afrobeats has become in recent years, it shouldn't be surprising that Nigerian artists dominated the charts of most exported artists in sub-Saharan Africa, with the dynamic duo Rema and Burna Boy leading the pack like musical royalty. These two aren't just Afrobeats ambassadors; they're global music forces. Rema's got the first

African-led single to hit a billion streams on Spotify, in his Calm Down collaboration with Selena Gomez, and he's the first Nigerian Afrobeats artist to crack Spotify's top 10 global chart of most-streamed artists in 2023.

They both also dominated the 2023 Billboard Awards. Burna Boy took home the Top Afrobeats Artist award, while Rema and Selena Gomez's Calm Down snagged Top Afrobeats Song. Talk about making waves!

But the Nigerian music scene isn't just about the two of them alone. Tems is the most exported female artist in SSA, coming in at number three overall. Ayra Starr, another Nigeria sensational artist snagged the title of the most streamed female artist in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda on Spotify in 2023. She also ranked number four on the top list of most exported artists in SSA. And let's not forget Asake, who is mesmerising audiences beyond Nigeria earned him the title of the most streamed artist in Nigeria, Ghana, and Togo, and in the top ten of most exported artists from SSA.

It's not just artists; Nigerian music itself is dominating the charts. Nine out of the top 10 most exported recordings in sub-Saharan Africa are Nigerian tunes! Rema's Calm Down and the remix version with Selena Gomez are both at the top, followed by Ayra Starr's Rush and CKay's Love Nwantiti (ah ah ah) – a song that's still going strong even after its 2021 release.

Of course, artists from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa have seen international success too. Ghana's Amaarae sits in the top 20.

Expand things a little further and you'll find artists from São Tomé and Príncipe (in the shape of Calema) and Côte d'Ivoire, through the Magic System. South African artists Master KG, Nomcebo Zikode, and Black Coffee are all among the top 40 most exported artists in the region, the first two thanks to their track Jerusalem, which is still going strong since its 2020 release, and subsequent social media chokehold.

## Meghan Thee Stallion goes off on ex-boyfriend Pardi over cheating claims

Meghan Thee Stallion is setting the record straight. Pardi and Meghan thee Stallion confirmed they were dating back in February 2021, then called things off in September 2023.

Pardi and Meghan thee Stallion confirmed they were dating back in February 2021, then called things off in September 2023. American rapper Meghan Thee Stallion has responded to her ex-boyfriend, Pardison's recent interview where he claimed that he did not cheat on her.

During Meghan's recent Instagram live session, she addressed Pardi's claims, accusing him of lying. "If it wasn't you, why are you answering? why are you try-

na make that shoe fit Cinderella? Y'all know how many Ni\*\*as y'all say I f\*\*k with.

"If it wasn't you 'getting your d\*\*k sucked in the same place I was sleeping in', then why the hell are you dissing me? If you say I wasn't talking to you, then I wasn't talking to you. You just wanted to find a reason to bash me, it all just seems so strategic. If I'm not talking about you, why are you talking about me?" Meghan said.

This comes after she released her newest song Cobra which trended because of a particular line that says, "Pulled up caught him cheating, getting his d\*\*k sucked in the same place I'm sleeping."

The line gained traction, causing social media users to speculate

that she was talking about Pardi. As a result of this, social media users took to his Instagram comment sections, accusing him of being a cheater.

Following this, Pardi responded

by releasing a diss track aimed at Meghan. Then more recently, he addressed the infamous line in an interview stating that the line really hurt his feelings.

"I'm not going to lie, I was absolutely hurt. I know you knew what it would do to me. I didn't think this person would choose to use me to sell a record and get clicks. Did I cheat? Yes, but did I cheat first? absolutely not," he said.



Stallion and Pardi



# SPORTS



## Super Eagles can challenge for title at AFCON 2023 - Osimhen

Victor Osimhen has declared that the Super Eagles are ready to conquer the rest of Africa once again. Osimhen and his teammates will be aiming for a fourth crown when hostilities start at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations in Cote d'Ivoire next month. The Super Eagles will face hosts Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau in Group A.

Having suffered a shocking ouster in the Round of 16 two years ago in Cameroon, the Napoli hitman insisted that the West Africans can challenge for the title this time around. "We are ready and preparing very well," Osimhen told CAF Media. "The squad is in high spirits. We are raring to go and hope that we shall do well there."

Jose Peseiro's side will face Equatorial Guinea in their opening fixture at the Alhassan Quattara Stadium, Ebimpe, Abidjan on January 14, 2024. Osimhen pens heartfelt message to family, fans after winning CAF award. Published on December 13, 2023. By Mike Oyebola

Napoli forward, Victor Osimhen

has penned an emotional message to his family members and supporters after winning the Men's Player of the Year gong at the CAF Awards 2023. Osimhen scooped the prestigious award at an elaborate ceremony held in Marrakech, Morocco on Monday night.

The 24-year-old beat strong competition from Achraf Hakimi and Mohamed Salah to land the individual honour. He became the first Nigerian to win the award after former Ajax and Arsenal forward, Nwankwo Kanu in 1999.

It was a remarkable night for Nigeria, with Barcelona Femeni star, Asisat Oshoala going home with the Women's Player of the Year award, while her Super Falcons teammate, Chiamaka Nnadozie claimed the Goalkeeper of the Year prize.

The Super Falcons were also named the National Team of the Year. Osimhen won the award on the back of his successful outing with Napoli last season.

The striker scored 26 goals to help the Partenopei win their first Scudetto in 33 years. In a heartfelt message posted on his X handle, Osimhen



reflected on his journey to stardom. "As a young boy who came from the streets of Olusosun, who had to hawk in traffic almost every day of the week while growing in-order to survive the numerous challenges my family and I were facing, becoming a Treasure in Africa and World Football was a wild dream. Words can't express the joy in my heart, this is a very special moment to me.

"My football journey has been a rollercoaster of highs, tough lows and emotions. The goals, echoes and jubilation of victories keeps me going even when the critics, hate and pain of defeats hit me hard in the chest. The support of my amazing family, my fans most especially my Nigerian supporters and the love for the beautiful game of football motivates me to aim higher daily.

"Losing my dear parents in the course of this journey leaves a scar in my heart as they have always been my major driving force for success since I was a kid, may their souls continue to rest in peace."

### Osimhen forgives Napoli for TikTok controversy

Nigeria forward Victor Osimhen claimed he has put the TikTok row with Napoli behind him.

The 24-year-old was mocked in a video published by the club's official TikTok account for missing a penalty in the 0-0 draw against Bologna in September. The striker's agent Roberto Calenda threatened legal action against Napoli at that time.

Osimhen posited that TikTok chaos was a 'stupid error' and insisted neither the club nor President Aurelio De Laurentiis treated him badly.

"I must clarify something," the former Lille star told the media after being crowned African Player of the Year. "I was not treated badly by Napoli or De Laurentiis. I'm sorry to say this word, but it was a stupid error from somebody who thought he could use a thing like that to joke at a crucial moment.

"I was certainly not happy, but De Laurentiis, his son Edoardo and many at the club have supported me," the striker continued.

"They explained the situation,

and even the person responsible for it was really nice to me. That was the most important thing. I spoke to that person and he proved to be deeply sorry. Everything has been solved, so I am happy with them. Now I look to the future to leave it behind. This story belongs to the past." Osimhen has scored six goals in 14 appearances for the Serie A champions.

### Long live new King and Queen - Drogba hails Osimhen, Oshoala

Cote d'Ivoire legend, Didier Drogba has celebrated Victor Osimhen and Asisat Oshoala on their triumph at the CAF Awards 2023.

Osimhen was named CAF Men's Player of the Year for 2023, while Oshoala claimed the Women's version.

Napoli striker, Osimhen becomes the first Nigerian to win the award in 24 years.

The duo of Vincent Enyeama and John Mikel Obi all came close to winning it after Nwankwo Kanu won the individual gong in 1999.

Barcelona Femeni star Oshoala won a record-extending sixth women's award.

Drogba took to the social media to felicitate with the duo and Nigeria.



### Rohr delighted with Osimhen's CAF award feat

Former Super Eagles head coach Gernot Rohr is thrilled to see Victor Osimhen win the African Football of the Year award.

Osimhen scooped the Men's Player of the Year at the CAF Awards 2023 at an elaborate ceremony in Marrakech, Morocco, on Monday night.

The 24-year-old finished in the number one position ahead of Achraf Hakimi and Mohamed Salah.

He was the first Nigerian to claim the gong after Nwankwo Kanu in 1999. Rohr, who handed Osimhen his Super Eagles debut, also believes the forward can fire the Super Eagles to glory at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations in Cote d'Ivoire.

"I'm so happy that Osimhen got



the Africa Best Player Award of 2023 because he truly deserves it after scoring so many goals and playing so well (for club and country)," Rohr told Nation Sport.

"Of course, with his goals, he can drive the Super Eagles to AFCON victory; he can do that and I hope that he will."

### Chippa United Keeper, Nwabili keen to make Super Eagles AFCON squad

Chippa United goalkeeper Stanley Nwabili is determined to make Nigeria's squad for the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations.

Nwabili, 27, has attracted the attention of Super Eagles head coach Jose Peseiro after several impressive displays for the Chilli Boys this season. In 12 league appearances this season, the goalkeeper has kept six clean sheets and conceded 10 goals.

Peseiro was at Chippa United's training ground on Friday to speak with the former Enyimba shot-stopper. The Portuguese will also watch Saturday's DStv Premiership clash between Chippa United and Golden Arrows.

Expressing his desire to be on the plane to Cote d'Ivoire 2023,

Nwabili told iDiski Times: "I wish to get a call-up but it's not compulsory. It's not by my performance because everyone is doing well in different clubs; other goalkeepers have been doing well in their clubs.

"If you are called up to your national team, kudos to you. I wish to represent my own country. I wish to wear my country's jersey. I wish to wear it again. I went there before and I wish to wear it again in a nice tournament. That's my wish."

Nwabili has been capped once at the senior level by Nigeria.

