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...Strong voice echoes the truth EISSN: 2736-0559 Friday 22 - Saturday 23 December, 2023 VOL. 4 NO. 136 N200

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OFALA EBUBEMBA 2023

Theme: **EJIRI MARA NDI IGBU**

30TH DECEMBER 2023
12:00PM

GUEST ARTISTS

- OLIVA NAYOKA (A.K.A DE LIVING)
- EZE UZU NA ICHIDA
- SHAMA MELODY
- K.C. VOICE
- Nfe Nfe Perikoma (Igbo Town Crier)
- NONSO NKWA
- LARRY BONGO
- IGWE CREDO
- ABABA NNA
- M.C. BIG MAN
- M.C. ELEGAMFACE

Ama Ofala Ebubemba
Umueziogwu, Uzoagba, Ikeduru LGA Imo State

News

Soludo on course to fulfill LGA election promise - Anambra Commissioner

The Commissioner for Economic Planning and Budgets, Mrs Chiamaka Nnake says conduct of local government elections is still a priority in the present administration's agenda to champion rapid change and development in all communities across the state.

Mrs. Nnake stated this in Awka during a stakeholders' forum tagged: "Strengthening transparency, accountability in governance and electoral process."

The forum drew participants from Anambra State House of Assembly, Anambra State Association Of Town Unions, ASATU, members of Anambra State Disability Commission, representatives of political parties, African Centre For Leadership Strategy and development, Inter-

national Peace and Civic Responsibility Centre, IPCRC, journalists, religious leaders among other community stakeholders in the state.

Addressing the gathering, Commissioner Nnake who spoke through the Senior Special Assistant to Governor Chukwuma Soludo on Partnership, Mrs. Ogochukwu Oji said that since he assumed office, Governor Soludo has been determined to alleviate the sufferings of the people through positive policies that have direct effect on the people at the grassroots.

Commissioner Nnake said as such Governor Soludo's promise on inauguration day to conduct an election that will see to the institution of democratically and constitutionally elected local government in the state remains paramount,

thus his drive to restore total peace and security to the local government areas affected by insecurity that predates his administration.

She assured Ndi Anambra that the present administration is committed to surpassing all its campaign promises to the citizens and stated categorically that Governor Soludo is one who follows due process in all he does and such is working hard to ensure that all the enablements for a peaceful conduct of peaceful, transparent, free and fair election is put in place in the 21 local government areas as no local government will be left out in the event of an election.

Contributing, the Chairman, Anambra State House of Assembly Committee on Local Government Affairs, Honourable Chimezie Ik-

wunne recounted several promises redeemed by Governor Soludo and surpassed and promised that the legislative and executive arms of government will work together to see to the peaceful conduct of the local government elections soon.

For the Director of Strategy, African Centre For Leadership Strategy and Development, Mr Itia Otabor and the President, International Peace and Civic Responsibility Centre, Prince Chris Azor recalled that Anambra

State last conducted local government elections in January, 2014 thus their reason to mobilize and galvanize critical stakeholders in the State to come up with strategies towards ensuring the emergence of democratically elected local government administration.

They pointed out that it is imperative to restructure the local government administration for transparency, accountability and improved service delivery, as required of every democratic govern-

ance structure so as to rejuvenate the interest of citizens with capacity to hold government to account on its responsibility.

For the State Secretary, Inter-party Advisory Committee (IPAC), Hon. Uzochukwu Eminent and Administration Secretary, Society For Equity, Justice And Peace, Anambra State, Venerable Jason Onyeakagbusi called on the State government to conduct local government elections into the 21 local government areas of the State without further delay.

Abia govt to enforce ban on street trading - Otti

Abia State Government has said it will enforce ban on street trading, especially in Aba, the commercial nerve centre, from next year.

Information and Culture Commissioner Prince Okey Kanu made this known while briefing reporters on the outcome of this week's Executive Council meeting presided over by Governor Alex Otti.

He said street trading had become a menace and was adversely impacting on the newly constructed roads.

Kanu said: "Despite spirited efforts by the government to tackle the menace, it is continuing unabated. The government will not fold its arms and watch the anomaly continue. "With the efforts the government has made, this menace (street trading) keeps rearing its ugly head, particularly in Aba.

"Most of the new roads this government has built, people use them to display their goods. This will not au-

gur well for these new roads." He reassured people of the government's determination to ensure one carriage way of the Ossah-Okpara Square road "is completed and used during this Yuletide."

The commissioner said Governor Otti was committed to making good his promise of defraying arrears of pensions owed pensioners by previous administrations." Commissioner for Power and Public Utilities Engr Ikechukwu said the Light Up Abia Initiative was aimed at lighting every street with solar light. "We started with Umuahia first, now we have moved to Aba." Governor Otti has said his administration is committed to rooting out crime, to ensure Abia remains safe.

He spoke on Wednesday while declaring open a one day 'Sensitisation Campaign Against Cultism and Drug Addiction in Nigeria', organised by Abia State Orientation Agency (ABSOA) and held at Michael Okpara Auditorium, Umuahia.

According to the governor, "no amount of alcohol, drug addiction or whatever it is that one has consumed will justify any action taken that is against the law.

"For us, we are single minded about rooting out crime and criminality and ensure that our state is safe for our citizens and visitors."

Inspector General of Police Kayode Egbetokun, represented by DCP Sani Shuaibu, described the campaign against cultism and drug addiction as timely and commendable, as the youth have fallen victim to cultism and drug addiction.

He said the police were ready to synergise with other sister agencies and the state government to fight cultism and drug addiction.

The Director General, Abia State Orientation Agency, Pastor Dike Nwankwo, said the programme was aimed at sensitising and reorienting the citizens, especially youths, on the danger of cultism and drug addiction.

Embrace productivity, shun illicit drugs, Uzodimma advises Youths

By Ikenna Orioha

Governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodimma, has advised youths to shun the abuse of illicit drugs, substances and narcotics, but embrace productivity to be useful to themselves, families, the community or the society.

Uzodimma who spoke through his Special Adviser on Narcotics and Illicit Drugs Monitoring, Hon. Chief Ezechukwu Nnamdi Obonna, said he is very much concerned about the progress, success and goodness of Imo youths hence he created the office of Narcotics and Illicit Drugs Monitoring including appointment, empowerment of youths on digital skills, agriculture, among others.

The enlightenment program against drug abuse was held at Umuochuaku Civic Hall, Ezeagbo in Ezinihitte Mbaise LGA, on Sunday and was organized by the Special Adviser to the Governor on Narcotics and Illicit Drugs Monitoring, Hon. Chief Ezechukwu Nnamdi Obonna, the NDLEA and Ikukuoma Sports Development Foundation. Over 1000 youths of Ezinihitte Mbaise attended the program with

many of them promising to stop the use of hard, illicit drugs, substances and narcotics to become useful.

The Governor who said he will intensify effort through the creation of more admissible grounds to engage youths on positive activities to encourage them to desist entirely from abuse of illicit drugs, substances and narcotics, thanked Ikukuoma Sports Development Foundation and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) for partnering with the state government to organize the awareness and enlightenment program against drug abuse at Ezinihitte Mbaise LGA.

"My motive of establishing the bureau of Narcotics and Illicit Drugs Monitoring is to make Imo a drug free state which will go a long way to making Imo a great state as youths are the future of tomorrow and catalyst for development. We are happy to partner with NDLEA, Ikukuoma Sports Development Foundation to host the enlightenment program against drug abuse which is in response to the numerous challenging illicit drugs, substances and narcotics abuse problems we are facing in Imo State and Nigeria

in general", the Governor maintained.

While calling on the youth of Ezinihitte Mbaise to stop taking hard drugs, excess alcohol, cigarette and other negative substances to live healthy, happily and wealthy and be useful to themselves, families and society, Deputy State Commander, Operation and Training, DSC Lamuwa Shehu, Assistant State Commander, Drug Demand Reduction Unit and Superintendent of Narcotics, PSO Rehabilitation Treatment and Counseling, Ugbede Chiamaka, observed that youths who engage in illicit drugs do not live healthy nor become useful, as abuse of illicit drugs, excess cigarette smoking and alcohol intake damage organs in the body.

They noted that drug abuse is a global problem which ought to be discarded, saying about 280 million people use drug worldwide, while 15 million persons abuse drugs in Nigeria, 6 million people are victims who are in dare need of help. They urged government to create more avenues to engage youths productively to spur them to shy away from hard drugs.

Stating that he has been in the vanguard of empowering youths through sports,

Yuletide: FRSC opens Enugu-Onitsha highway to ease traffic

Head of the festive period, MTN Nigeria is partnering the Federal Road Safety Corps to temporarily open the Amawbia, Anambra State sections of the partially completed Enugu-Onitsha Dual Carriage Way.

Telecommunications giant MTN is the financier of the dual carriageway that connects Anambra and other South-East states.

The Coordinator, MTN Community Liaison Initiative, Dr Reginald Facah, during a press conference in Amawbia, near Awka, Anambra State, said the road was opened to ease traffic

flow for South-East commuters travelling during the Yuletide.

Facah noted that there has been a high influx of traffic along the Onitsha carriage-way resulting in gridlock because of the Yuletide season, adding that the essence of opening the road is to decongest the traffic to make travelling seamless for road users.

He said, "Today, we are gathered to temporarily open the partially completed sections of the Enugu-Onitsha Dual Carriage Way, not because the entire project is ready, but because December and Christmas have seen unimaginable suffering on the

parts of commuters and drivers on this same road.

"However, with today's opening of the Amawbia section and the opening of Amawbia flyover, an untrammelled driving experience is once again here for human and vehicular traffic which are usually high during this period."

On his part, the Senior Manager Sales, MTN, Emmanuel Okereke, said the organisation is excited to partner with the Federal Government on a road infrastructure tax credit scheme to complete the rehabilitation of the Enugu-Onitsha Expressway.

Your betrayal, sabotage still fresh in people's minds - LP warns Soludo

The Anambra State chapter of the Labour Party (LP) has accused Governor Charles Soludo of being insensitive to the plight of the people.

The party accused the governor of subjecting the people to extreme poverty.

Speaking via a statement by its State Chairman, Ugochukwu Emeh, the LP alleged that the government diverted palliatives sent to Anambra State to cushion the effect of fuel subsidy removal.

LP made the remark in a

reply to the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) statement against Senator Tony Nwoye.

Emeh asserted that Soludo's betrayal and sabotage is still fresh in the minds of the people.

The statement reads in part, "Dr. Tony Nwoye was elected to the national Assembly by the great and good people of Anambra North senatorial District because of his unique style of leadership. He is one of the leaders in our party we are proud of. He has been vocal on state and national issues.

"The recent Statement he made at a reception held in his Honour and other members of our great party has brought fear upon Governor Soludo and Ndi APGA.

In case, Prof. Soludo thinks we have forgotten, Ndi Anambra have not forgotten and what Senator Nwoye did was to remind Prof. Soludo, your betrayal and sabotage is still fresh in the minds of the people.

We are proud of What Senator Victor Umeh and Senator Dr Tony Nwoye are doing in the Senate."

News

Christmas: Ebonyi Gov's wife facilitates release of 53 inmates

The Ebonyi Governor's wife, Mrs Marymaudline Nwifuru, has facilitated the release of 53 inmates from Abakaliki Correction Service.

Mrs Nwifuru on Wednesday, said that the intervention was prompted by her visit to the center last October where she discovered that some persons were convicted with the option of fine but could not go home over their inability to perfect the bail condition.

She said that the freed inmates would be included in her empowerment programmes to enable them to abstain from all forms of criminalities.

This, governor's wife said, would be done through her project, Better Health for Rural Women, Children and Internally Displaced Persons Foundation, (BERWO).

"I am delighted to be here

to witness the act of God upon your lives and to felicitate with you in the spirit of Christmas.

"Today's event is in line with the peoples charter of needs and my modest project, BERWO which provides succor and assured hope," she said.

According to her, there was another category of inmates who were granted bail with conditions but the people could not perfect their bail condition and having noticed the situation as the mother of the state.

"I intimated with her husband, the Governor, over plights of people and out of magnanimity, the governor supported by undertaking to pay the court fines and the perfection of the conditions of the bail to secure their freedom," she explained.

Mrs Nwifuru appealed to the freed persons to live in accordance with the law of

the land in order not to be a burden to the society.

She urged the good spirited individuals to assist the freed persons in their various areas mostly as they have learnt their lessons and are ready to turn a new leaf.

In his remarks, the Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice in the state, Mr Bernard Odo, said that the decongestion of the center required a drastic measure.

Odo noted that the capacity of Abakaliki center is 387 inmates but regrettably, the place was housing 1,466 inmates.

He said, "The comptroller has written to me that there is no more chance to accommodate others and on that note, his men would not accept other persons.

"In the course of my assessment into one of the cells, I discovered that one cell contains 126 persons

with one toilet," Odo said.

He commended the governor's wife for the gesture and described freedom of liberty as the greatest of the fundamental human rights.

The attorney general encouraged the freed persons to utilise the opportunity optimally by avoiding crime.

He frowned at the di-

lapidating criminal justice system in the country and called for remedy over the deteriorating situation.

The Assistant Comptroller of Correction, Mr. Benedict Oyoko in charge of Medium Security Center, Abakaliki, Ebonyi Command, applauded Mrs Nwifuru and appealed for continuous support.

Oyoko added that the exercise had saved the beneficiaries from the over-crowded nature of the center and possible outbreak of disease.

Mr. Peter Nwofoke, One of the beneficiaries, while narrating his ordeal, described his release as divine intervention and appreciated the governor's wife for the assistance.

Akwa Ibom beats Ebonyi, FCT, others to emerge cleanest state

Akwa Ibom State has beaten Ebonyi State, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja and the rest states to emerge Nigeria's cleanest state for the sixth time with a cumulative score of 72 per cent.

The result was announced yesterday in Uyo, the state capital, following a survey conducted under the five years project review circus, tagged: 'STONE Pro- Max 2023'.

Akwa Ibom since the inauguration of the STONE project in 2018 has maintained first position, having won five times in a row.

National Coordinator/Secretary, National Technical Study Group (NTSG) on Clean Up Nigeria, Prince Ene Baba Owoh, Jr., congratulated the government and people of Akwa Ibom State on emerging five times overall Cleanest State in Nigeria.

"For emerging the overall best performing state in the six years performance indicators and five times cleanest state in Nigeria under the six years project circus review period (2018-2023) tagged: 'STONE Pro- Max 2023',

Akwa Ibom State will be conferred with the STONE 2023 Pro-Max 2018-2023 Cleanest State in Nigeria Green Crystal Award.

"It is therefore our privilege to proudly invite the Chairman of Akwa Ibom State Environmental Protection and Waste Management Agency (AKSPEWMA), Obong Prince Ikim, to come forward and receive the Cleanest State in Nigeria Pro-max Green Crystal Awards certification in all the five performance indicators and the STONE Pro-max (2018-2023) five times Cleanest State in Nigeria, Green Crystal Award," he said.

Owoh also announced Ebonyi and FCT to have closely followed Akwa Ibom in second and third positions with 50 and 47 per cent scores.

He encouraged stakeholders to engage in peer review mechanisms by creating time to visit both best performing states/cities and the backward states/cities to gain more insight into what the top states are doing in order to improve on their performance ratings.

the state government to continue to work to ensure a

safe and secure environment through institutional frameworks that would support a safe environment.

The commissioner pledged government's commitment to proper waste management, end to gas flaring and other practices that threaten the serenity of the environment.

Youths threaten to shut down oil operations

Reacting to the awards, the Chairman, Akwa Ibom State Environmental Protection and Waste Management Agency (AKSPEWMA), Prince Akpan Ikim, paid glowing tributes to former Governor Victor Attah for creating the agency by signing into law the Akwa Ibom State Environmental Protection and Waste Management Agency CAP 47 law 2000.

He acknowledged former Governor Godswill Akpabio, who built the receptacle maintenance and workshop at Itam, for proper waste disposal and management.

"Then Udom Emmanuel came, and had that political will to constitute the board and gave us all the necessary support and we started winning the cleanest state award in 2018.

"Then Governor Umo Eno, he has given us the necessary support. It is on record that he is the first governor that has joined us for environmental sanitation.

"He has given us a marching order to ensure the state remains the cleanest in Nigeria, ranging from the vegetation. There is what we call environmental sustainability. We are looking at recycling waste to wealth etc.

"So, we are working with the House of Assembly Committee on Environment for a law that has to be in tune with international best practices. The law has to be such that will encourage investors to come in. This is why we are also liaising with AKICORP so that anyone who has investment that has to do with waste will register with them," he said.

He praised Clean Up Nigeria Initiative for recognising excellence and pledge to keep Akwa Ibom as a model clean state in Nigeria.



Umahi with some members of the inaugurated Board, FERMA in Abuja.

Police arrest IPOB/ ESN Commander funded by Simon Ekpa in Mgbidi

By Grace Ofurum

Imo State Police Command has arrested an IPOB/ ESN Commander, Ikechukwu UBA of Emoha Mgbidi in Oru west LGA, Imo state.

The operation was carried out by the commands Anti kidnapping squad led by CSP Oladimeji Odeyeyiwa.

According to a press release by the police spokesman, ASP Henry Okoye the Anti kidnapping squad stormed the hideout of the suspects on 16/12/2023 and arrested him and three others.

According to the release, "On interrogation, the suspect confessed to being a member of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) Terrorist group, commanding Mgbidi axis and stated further that he masterminded the attacks on Omuma Police Station and soldiers at Mgbidi and Awo-Mmama, narrating further that he receives funding from the Fin-

land-based Simon Ekpa to carry out Terrorist attacks in the State"

The suspects when arrested provided useful information that led to the arrest of a Traditional ruler of Isi Mgbidi Emoha Mgbidi, Autonomous, HRH Anomie Augustine Agbarambo 'm', 51 yrs, who is also part of the sponsors.

Some items were recovered from his house which includes, two locally made revolver long guns, one double barrel long gun, and 33 rounds of live Cartridges.

The police revealed that Investigation is in progress and the suspects will be arraigned in court upon completion of a diligent investigation.

In a related Development, operatives of Nekede Divisional Headquarters while on intelligence-led surveillance patrol on 10/12/2023 arrested a suspected kidnapper named, Sylvester Humble, 'm', of Umuoma Nekede, searched and recovered

one locally made pistol in his possession.

In the course of the investigation, the suspect admitted to being a member of a notorious kidnapping syndicate terrorizing the residents of Nekeke and Ihiagwa in Imo State and volunteered useful information that will assist the Police in the arrest of his cohorts at large. He will be arraigned upon completion of a comprehensive investigation.

The Commissioner of Police, Imo State, CP Aboki Danjuma while appreciating the gallant operatives for sustained efforts in achieving this operational feat charged them to sustain the tempo in the fight against all forms of crime and criminality in the State. The CP assured the good people of Imo State that the Command has placed enhanced proactive security strategies that will ensure the entire length and breadth of the State is adequately policed during and after the Yuletide season.

Pull down all political billboards – Abia Gov Otti orders LG chairmen

Ahead of the Christmas festivities, the Abia State Government has directed all local government council chairmen to dismantle all political billboards from the recent general elections.

Commissioner for Information and Culture, Prince Okey Kanu, announced the order following this week's state executive council meeting, presided over by Governor Alex Otti.

He also expressed regret that street trading in the state has become a menace and is adversely impacting the newly constructed roads by the government.

According to him, "Despite spirited efforts by the government to arrest the menace, it continues unabated," warning that the

government will not fold its arms and watch the anomaly continue.

"With all the efforts the government has made, this menace (street trading) keeps rearing its ugly head, particularly in Aba. Incidentally, most of the new roads that the government has constructed, people use them to trade, and this will not augur well for these new roads.

"There has been a lot of interface between government officials and the market authorities, and in other instances, the culprits as it were; everything has been done, but to no avail.

Despite the fact that this government puts a human face on its activities, by the New Year, the government will go all out to enforce the law"

Editorial

Never again, shall all our Refineries shutdown at same time

The Port Harcourt Refining Company in Rivers State has recommenced operation in line with the Federal Government's promise to ensure the production of refined products at the facility in December 2023.

The development is coming after many years of underperformance and turnaround maintenance of the facility. Four of Nigeria's refineries in Port Harcourt, Warri, and Kaduna have a combined capacity to process 445,000 barrels per day (bpd). But they were shut down in 2019.

However, in August, the Minister of State for Petroleum Resources (Oil) Senator Heineken Lokpobiri, said the Port Harcourt refinery will recommence operations in December.

Lokpobiri said this during an inspection tour of the rehabilitation work at the PHRC Ltd plant in August this year. In his statement; "Our objective in coming here today is to ensure that in the next few years, Nigeria stops fuel importation. From what we have seen here today, Port Harcourt Refinery will come on board by the end of the year." The recommencement of operations at the Port Harcourt refinery comes over two years after the Federal Government approved funding of \$1.5 billion (1.2 billion euros) to repair one of its biggest oil refineries.

The government chose an Italian firm Maire Tecnimont to carry out the repair work at the Port Harcourt facility which has a capacity of some 210,000 bpd.

"We are happy to announce that the rehabilitation of productivity refinery will commence in three phases," the then-Minister of Petroleum (State) Timipre Sylva told reporters.

"The first phase is to be completed in 18 months, which will take the refinery to a production of 90 percent of its nameplate capacity," said Sylva, adding that the second phase would be completed in 24 months and the third in 44 months. Despite being Africa's number one oil producer, Nigeria has relied on imports of petroleum products because of a lack of domestic refining capacity. Fuel shortages are commonplace.

But as part of moves to overhaul the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), the government has been working to improve capacity at the country's under-performing state-owned refineries.

It is hoped that the resumption of refinery activity in the facility and the commencement of a similar exercise at the Dangote Refinery will improve the supply of fuel in Africa's largest oil producer and allow the country to make savings on refined fuel and other petroleum products. With the removal of subsidy on fuel, the move is also expected to impact on the cost of the product. Recall that Nigeria's crude oil production dropped in November, data from the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has shown.

Oil production from the 13 members

of the organisation averaged 27.84 million barrels per day (mb/d) in November 2023, lower by 57 thousand barrels per day (tb/d), month-on-month, OPEC said in its Monthly Oil Market Report released Wednesday.

The report also noted that crude oil output increased mainly in Venezuela, Libya and Kuwait, while production in Iraq, Angola and Nigeria decreased.

Nigeria's crude oil production dropped to 1.37 million barrels per day in November, from 1.38 million bpd in October 2023, an OPEC survey, which cites secondary data sources. However, according to the oil cartel's direct communication data, Nigeria's crude oil production dropped to 1.25 million barrels per day from 1.35 million in October 2023.

OPEC indicated it gets its crude oil production figures mainly from two sources, either as direct communication by member countries or by information released by secondary energy intelligence platforms.

The recent drop in the country's crude production comes at a time when the country is faced with a heavily disrupted crude sector plagued by oil theft and pipeline vandalism.

In November, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd) said oil thieves vandalised over 5,000 kilometres of oil pipelines connecting different parts of the country.

The Chief Executive Officer of NNPC Ltd, Mele Kyari, who disclosed this when he appeared before the Senate Committee on Petroleum (Downstream) said the continuous vandalism of the pipelines was causing a huge loss to the NNPC Ltd while describing the situation as a 'national calamity'.

"Over 5,000 kilometres of oil pipelines in the country are not working as a result of pipeline vandalism.

Ten million litres of oil was lost from the volume pumped from Aba to Enugu at a time. The company has been unable to pump oil from Warri to Benin within the last 22 years and cannot connect to Ore.

"There is no amount of security measures that had not been taken to curb the crime without success, which to us in NNPC Ltd, is substantially a national calamity," he said.

Again, the Chief Executive Officer of NNPC Ltd, Mele Kyari, had disclosed, that illegal oil refiners connected 4,800 pipelines on its over 5,000 kilometres of oil pipeline across the country, when he appeared before the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

We therefore urge the Federal Government of Nigeria under President Tinubu's watch, never to allow the nation's Petroleum Refineries shutdown again, especially the four at the same time. And furthermore, the FG should seriously combat the oil thieves, track and close down all illegal oil connections in the country.

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Opinion

Tinubu's first six months: Redemption Way or Road to Golgotha?

By Kalu Okoronkwo

An unbiased and dispassionate assessment of Tinubu's first six months in office can only return one verdict: it has bought unmitigated hardship and thrown more Nigerians multidimensional poverty. Food inflation is at its highest ever that even a bulb of onion has become a gem stone to be pampered and cherished.

The "removal" of fuel subsidy (we understand there is still some price stabilization mechanism going on) and the merger of the official and parallel foreign exchange rates have made living and life a hell in Nigeria that many had taken the option of ending their life and going to the "real" hell where there is some form organization. The fire there the Holy Book tells us burn in perpetuity.

Two international organizations have recently rated Tinubu's economic policies within the first six months very low thus buttressing the reality of the administration's defective leadership. While the Financial Times of London described the policies as "flawed", the IMF has doubted Nigeria's quest for growth under the policies of the present administration.

Leadership is often measured by the impact of policies on the lives of the citizens. Within the first six months of President Ahmed Tinubu's administration, certain policy initiatives and their implementation have come under intense scrutiny for the unmitigated hardships imposed on the populace. But it seems that the administration has adopted a policy of "suffer now, enjoy later", a prospect the citizens are not seeing in the horizon.

As the custodian of the nation's well-being, the government's responsibility is not only to enact policies but to ensure they uplift rather than burden the citizens.

For instance, the administration's economic policies, particularly those related to fiscal and monetary measures, have been a source of considerable hardship. The implementation of, currency devaluation, and subsidy removals have led to an unprecedented surge in inflation, significantly diminishing the purchasing power of ordinary citizens.

In its assessment of the implementation of the naira devaluation, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has faulted the economic policy of Tinubu's administration insisting that Nigeria is not positioned to benefit from such policies not being an industrialized nation.

The IMF argued that where goods are produced for export, devaluation of a country's currency will result in attracting foreign investment taking advantage of the competitive value of the currency to invest and export. The obvious implication of this policy by the Tinubu's administration is that the naira has been open to wild fluctuations and compounding the economic woes of the citizens who depend more on imported products.

The devaluation of the naira has also led to depletion of the country's external reserve as government has to

“ With the hue and cry of the citizens over the eight years presidency of the All-Progressive Congress (APC) under the Buhari's administration, Nigerians never bargained for an extended unmitigated suffering and the kind being witnessed under the present administration. ”

inject the hard-earned currency to shore up the naira most times. When the naira exchanges for N1200 to the dollar and N1500 to the pound sterling in a country with over 80% poor population and depending heavily on imported products, how does the government expect its poor citizens to survive?

The administration's foreign exchange policies have faced criticism for their impact on businesses. The scarcity of foreign exchange and strict currency controls have impeded the operations of businesses as value chains are disrupted due to scarcity of foreign currency. The era of Letter of Credit, a well-known economic route of sourcing raw materials and other goods abroad are long gone leaving businesses to seek foreign exchange in the expensive parallel market. The resultant effect is the collapse of many businesses. Multi-national organisations are also leaving our shores by the day, while some foreign airlines frustrated by their inability to repatriate sales abroad have avoided the Nigerian airspace. Those who are still coming have trippled their fares beyond the reach of the average Nigerian. Job losses have are chalking up in thousands.

The decision to deregulate fuel prices, ostensibly to encourage market-driven pricing, has resulted in a domino effect on transportation costs. With fuel prices subject to market forces, the ripple effect on public transportation has been profound. Many unable to afford even intra-city transportation have resorted to trekking to their destinations. A regular sight at different bus stops in Lagos for instance, are people massed together not waiting to board a public transport but hoping to get a free ride from car owners. So they surge like an ocean in high tide anytime a private car stops at the bus stop hoping to be the lucky one. While the administration has initiated various social intervention programs to alleviate poverty, the jury is still out on their impact.

Rising poverty rate and an increasing number of citizens falling below the poverty line suggests a misalignment between the design and execution of these programs and the persistent hardships faced by the vulnerable population.

Government seems unconcerned by the obvious implication

of its fiscal policies which is stifling the population as there is no sign of obvious solution in sight.

Given the hardship and high cost of living in Nigeria, one of Nigeria's oldest and biggest manufacturers of FMCG, Procter and Gamble (P&G) just closed its manufacturing arm in Nigeria with attendant job losses. Citing high cost of doing business in Nigeria, the manufacturer decided to change its business strategy in Nigeria and opted for importation of the products abroad where economic policies are friendly. What an economic ragedy.

This is coming on the heels of the departure of the giant pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) which also recently relocated its manufacturing from Nigeria.

With the hue and cry of the citizens over the eight years presidency of the All-Progressive Congress (APC) under the Buhari's administration, Nigerians never bargained for an extended unmitigated suffering and the kind being witnessed under the present administration.

One of the glaring issues affecting the Nigerian economy under the APC administration has been the persistent rise in inflation. The soaring prices of essential commodities, coupled with a weakening purchasing power, have significantly burdened ordinary citizens. Despite various policy interventions, the inflationary trend has proven stubborn, adversely affecting the living standards of Nigerians.

The promise of job creation was a basis of the APC's economic agenda. However, the reality has been a surge in unemployment rates. The failure to generate sufficient employment opportunities has left many Nigerian youths and families disillusioned and frustrated. The resultant effect is that Nigerians are deserting their country in thousands every day to other countries with conducive economic environment where they hope to apply their skills to earn a better living. High unemployment not only hampers economic growth but also poses social and security challenges for the nation.

Too many other economic challenges have prompted the citizens to question the need for much promised Renewed Hope mantra of the APC and

the Tinubu administration.

Paradoxically what people see in this administration is a culture of waste and ostentatious living: buying of expensive SUVs, controversial presidential yacht, carnival-like foreign trips burning the scarce foreign exchange, personal luxury like renovation of the residences of the President and his vice with sums running into billions of Naira. Pray, were the buildings hit by an earthquake because the two top citizens of Nigeria lived and only vacated those apartments about six months ago. Did they removed the blocks, roofing and the wiring? What is the cost of a brand new building from foundation?

The Tinubu administration must as a matter of exigency examine how present policies can be recalibrated to foster economic growth, reduce inequality, and improve the overall well-being of the citizens.

Ensuring fiscal responsibility and transparent governance is paramount for rebuilding trust and confidence. Clear communication about economic policies, their objectives, and their expected impact is essential. This transparency helps in managing public expectations and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the nation's economic well-being.

Moving Nigeria forward requires inclusive governance that involves all stakeholders in the decision-making process. Engaging with civil society, organised private sector and the general public can lead to more informed policies that reflect the diverse needs of the population.

This collaborative approach ensures that policies are better suited to address the complexities of Nigeria's socio-economic landscape.

In assessing the policy initiatives and their implementation under President Tinubu's administration, it becomes apparent that the well-intentioned efforts to address various challenges have, in many instances, translated into unmitigated hardships for the citizens.

As the nation contends with economic uncertainties, rising inflation, security concerns, and social vulnerabilities, a critical examination of policy strategies is imperative. The path forward requires immediate introduction of policies that not only confront challenges head-on but also prioritize the welfare and prosperity of the Nigerian people.

While Nigeria is facing economic challenges, it is essential to view these challenges as opportunities for positive transformation. By embracing comprehensive economic reforms, prioritizing social welfare, creating job opportunities, accelerating infrastructure development, and fostering inclusive governance, Nigeria can move faster on a path of sustainable growth and development. The collective effort of government, private sector, and citizens is paramount in shaping a future where economic policies are not just markers of change but catalysts for progress and prosperity for all. For now, Nigerians are divided on whether the country under Tinubu is on the path of redemption or Golgotha.

News

76 officers of NIS, Imo Command get promotion

Newly promoted Deputy Comptroller of the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Imo State Command, N.M Ezugwu with other top brass of the Command decorated the 76 newly promoted officers with their new ranks before members of their families, friends and associates.

Ezugwu who was until last week, the Command's Comptroller but now elevated to Deputy Comptroller in charge of Zone E, Owerri was exceedingly happy, as she pointed out that, this is the first time in the history of the Command that such number of officers received promotion even as he advised them on the need to

be patriotic, dedicated and committed in their duties noting hard work and discipline as the hallmarks of good officer and promotion.

Mrs. Nkechi Ezugwu decorates the Command's PRO, Okere while the wife watches in admiration.

She charged the beneficiaries of the promotion on the need for them to be good Ambassadors of NIS and to gird their loins in preparations to defend the nation at all times, stressing that self discipline and decorum should always be their watchwords.

AGC Nkechi Monica Ezugwu presented the tables and chairs to Imo State Command of NIS. Pix by

Everest Ezihe, Owerri.

Ezugwu maintained that though hard work pays but promotion comes from Almighty God and enjoined officers that did not benefit from the promotions to exercise patience, that definitely their own will come at God's appointed time.

Earlier before the well attended decoration ceremony of the newly promoted cum upgraded officers, the workaholic Deputy Comptroller supervised and took a salute from the scientific parade of the 31 newly recruited Superintendents of Immigration who were passing out from their three months basic intensive induction training before proceeding for their 3 months

officers training courses.

According to her, "as para-military officers now, you should be ready and willing to defend the nation at all times, be disciplined and demonstrate leadership by examples, patriotism, humility and respect, must be your watchwords" she advised them.

The Deputy Comptroller reminded them that as Immigration officers that they are part and parcel of the nation's security ambassadors, and further enjoined them on the absolute need for them to be role models and to shun all forms of crime so as to justify the trust and confidence reposed in them, as stated in their oaths of service and allegiance.

She also commended them for their physical fitness and advised others who are yet to benefit from the exercise not to be dejected or demoralized but to sustain their faith in God and wait for their turn, saying all about life is turn by turn.

The highlights of the occasion were personal donations of quality new furniture comprising 30 chairs and 30 tables by the Deputy Comptroller.

She freely and equitably distributed them to the various departments and offices of the Command and presentation of a book titled, "Military and Para-Military Agencies "the Core Elements and Cooperate Strategies" by author DCI, JC Ncharam,

Pec.

Ezugwu expressed dissatisfaction that her efforts to relocate the Command to a more conducive and independent environment did not materialized but assured them that the Minister of Interior Services has taken it as a responsibility to relocate them by next year to their permanent site at Avu, Owerri West LGA of the state.

Mrs. Ezugwu who later gave a breakdown of the officers elevated said that while 12 officers were promoted from the rank of Chief Superintendent of Immigration (CSI) to Assistant Comptrollers of Immigration (ACI).

20 Officers were promoted from the rank of Superintendent of Immigration (SI) to Chief Superintendent of Immigration (CSI).7 Officers were promoted from the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Immigration (DSI) to Superintendent of Immigration (SI).17 Officers were promoted from the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Immigration one (ASI1) to Deputy Superintendent of Immigration (DSI) including the Command PRO *DSI CN OKERE.13 Officers were also promoted from the rank of Assistant Superintendent

two (ASI2) to Assistant Superintendent of Immigration one (ASI1).7 Inspectors were elevated to Officers cadre to the rank of Assistant Superintendent two (ASI2).

Mrs. Nkechi Ezugwu inspecting the parade of honour. Pix by Everest Ezihe, Owerri

Mrs. Nkechi Ezugwu inspecting the parade of honour. Pix by Everest Ezihe, Owerri

In her votes of thanks, Mrs. Sunday Boniface, one of the promoted officers who gave God Almighty the credits for the promotion expressed gratitude to the Comptroller General of Immigration, CGI Caroline Adepoju for given priority attentions to workers welfare.

Boniface also thanked ACG Angela Ilo-Okoye of Zone E for her labour of love as well as Mrs. Nkechi Ezugwu, the State Command Comptroller who she said has been promoted to ACG for her visionary leadership, motherly advises and motivations.

She reminded all the promoted for the challenges ahead and prayed God for the strength and wisdom to overcome.



Centre on white; Sen Uche Ekwunife shortly after the commissioning of Eke Abatete market in Idemili North, Anambra State.

Senate confirms Nwosu-Iheme, 10 others as S/Court Justices

The Senate has confirmed the appointment of 11 new Justices to the Supreme Court, finally bringing the nation's highest judicial body to its full capacity of 21 members.

The vacancies were left by retirements and deaths.

President Bola Tinubu had in a letter to the red chamber on Wednesday, nominated the 11 Justices following recommendations

from the National Judicial Council.

The justices include Justice Haruna Tsammani (Northeast), who chaired the Presidential Election Petition Court, Justice Moore

Adumein (South-South), Justice Jummai Sankey (North-central), Justice Chidiebere Uwa (South-east) and Justice Chioma Nwosu-Iheme (South-east)

The others include Justice Obande Ogbuinya (South-east), Justice Stephen Adah (North-central), Justice Habeeb Abiru (South-west), Justice Jamilu Tukur (Northwest), Justice Abubakar Umar (North-west) and Justice Mohammed Idris (North-central).

The Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Matters reviewed the nominations and verified their qualifications.

Committee Chairman Mohammed Tahir assured the Senate that all nominees met the required 15 years of experience outlined in the Constitution and demonstrated exceptional qualities for the demanding role.

Deputy Senate President Jibrin Barau commended the Committee's thoroughness and expressed confidence in the chosen Justices' abilities. Following a voice vote, the Senate unanimously confirmed all 11 nominees.

Fubara, Nwifuru Challenge other Governors, splash N100,000 Xmas bonus on workers

Governor Francis Nwifuru of Ebonyi state like his Rivers State Counterpart has approved N100,000 for all civil servants in the State as Christmas bonus

Nwifuru announced this during the Renewed Hope Initiative Elderly Support Scheme Christmas Party sponsored by the wife of the President, Sen. Oluremi Tinubu, which took place at the Ecumenical Center Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

The governor emphasized that the resources of the state belongs to the people and won't be allowed to continue to suffer in poverty.

He said: "I have decided to take a good step, it is hard but we must do it. The workers of this state must live like others in this Christmas period. In this season you need to bless

your neighbor, you need to be a blessing to your home.

"And as a leader of the state, it is necessary to be a blessing in the homes of everyone in this state. I cannot say that I'm doing this because it is not my personal money, it is the money of the state that I am using, which I was elected to manage.

"I have resolved with the caucus and principal officers of government, since I came in, that workers in Ebonyi state should have something to celebrate.

"I'm going to have meeting with local government chairmen, and every worker in this state must get 100,000 naira as Christmas gift including a bag of rice" he stated.

Earlier in a remark, the wife of the governor, Mrs Uzozamaka Mary-Maudline Nwifuru who represented the wife of

the president, said that the scheme is targeted to support two hundred and fifty vulnerable elderly citizens aged 65 and above in all the 36 states of the Federation, the federal Capital Territory and Veterans from the Defence and Police officers ' Wives Association.

Recall that Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara had earlier this week approved the sum of One Hundred Thousand Naira (N100, 000) as Christmas bonus for the state's civil servants on the state payroll.

Warisenibo Joe Johnson, Commissioner for information, confirmed the Christmas bonus to PM News.

Johnson stated that Gov. Fubara gave the approval on Tuesday for immediate implementation to enable the civil servants to have a wonderful yuletide celebration.

Founder, Tabitha Initiative awarded by Anglican Communion

By Grace Ofurum

Founder Tabitha philanthropic Community Initiative, Mrs Eunice Ikwaugwu has been inducted as Mother Tabitha by the Anglican Bishop of Owerri, RT Rev Chukwuma Oparah PhD, JP on the occasion of his 5th year Episcopal Anniversary held at the Cathedral Church of the Transfiguration of our Lord (CATOL) Owerri.

Speaking to newsmen after her Induction as Mother Tabitha, Mrs Ikwaugwu said the non governmental Organization started in 2003 in her quest to meet the socio-economic needs of the less privileged in the society especially across the five south Eastern states.

she disclosed that the initiative started when she left Nigeria for the US and saw the need to allviate the plights of the poor, this made her to start shipping barrels of items from the US to be distributed to communities and churches. as she noted that she decided not use her wealth to acquire properties but channeled her resources to the less privileged in the local communities.

She said that the foundation has empowered lots of women in their business as well as youths who has been trained in various skills and

lots of other empowerments.

According to her, she took after her mother who was also a philanthropist who touched so many lives with her resources, this support to the church and the communities endeared her to be recognised as Mother Tabitha by the Anglican church after the Biblical Deborah who was famous for helping people.

Mrs Ikwaugwu also seized the reception of her Induction to feed the people that came to felicitate with her on the award and also distributed lots of sourvenir as a show of appreciation.

In his words Mazi Kelechi, Ejiogu, a relative of the celebrant, said the act of giving is a gift from God and expressed delight over the activities of The founder and her foundation and said that with the foundation

based in US and Nigeria more people would be reached. He further prayed for good health and longlife for the founder praying that God will sustain her efforts and being more increase.

Also a member of the founder, Mr Festus Chibueze Ejiogu also attested to the philanthropic works of the founder who he described as a giver without reservation and disclosed that she has impacted lots of lives and prayed God to continue to bless her immensely.

News

Samdaddy absent as Ihedioha, Udenwa grace Imo PDP SEC meeting

The Governorship candidate of the Imo State Peoples Democratic Party PDP in the just concluded election, Senator Samuel Anyanwu Samdaddy, was notably absent as the party held its State Executive Council meeting to fill vacant positions in the party.

After opening formalities such as opening prayers, presentation of Kolanuts, the State Organizing Secretary cited relevant sections of the PDP constitution as to what constitutes a quorum which is 1/3 of the total members. Attendance was taken and there were 46 Members present which constituted over 50% of Imo SEC membership.

A motion was moved by Rt Hon Okey Onyekanma to appoint the State Legal Advisor, Barr Kissinger Ikukwo as the Protempore secretary of the SEC. Motion was Seconded by Sir Stanley Ekezie and was unanimously adopted.

The State Chairman of the party, Chief Engr Charles Ugwu in his opening remarks welcomed the SEC Members and thanked them for their commitment towards the progress and survival of the party. He regretted the setbacks witnessed in the recent past and urged everyone to unite with a common goal of moving the party forward. He also congratulated Imo PDP lawmakers who won their cases in court.

In his remarks, The National Vice Chairman of PDP South East, Chief Ali Odefa who was represented by the duo of South East Zonal Publicity Secretary Chief Austin Okeke and the Zonal Youth Leader, Barr Dominic Obinna Nwankwo; thanked the State Executive Council and the State Chairman for their resilience despite challenges. He stated that his presence at the SEC is in line with his constitutional responsibility of oversight, while suing for unity of the party at all levels.

State Chairman read out correspondences from the National Working Committee of the party to the State Executive Council which affirmed Engr Charles Ugwu as the authentic chairman of the PDP in Imo State.

The State Organizing Secretary, Nze Lawrence Biaduo read out the agenda of the meeting which is the constitutional replacement of vacant positions in the State Executive Councils which was created by the resignation of the former holders.

The Vacant Positions were as follows:

The State Deputy Chairman

The State Secretary
State Vice Chairman (Orlu zone)

State Assistant Secretary (Owerri Zone)

State Youth Leader

Assistant State Legal Advisor

State Treasurer

State Woman Leader

State Assistant Treasurer

State Publicity Secretary

State Ex Officio

Written nominations were read out and oral nominations were also taken from the affected Federal Constituencies and zones. Votes were cast and the following individuals were rectified and approved by the State Executive Council to fill the vacant positions.

A. The State Deputy Chairman – Chief Clifford Orjiako

B. The State Secretary – Hon Solomon Onwuegbuchulam

C. State Vice Chairman (Orlu zone) – Chief Demian Ezeruo

D. State Assistant Secretary (Owerri Zone) – Hon Macdonald Enwere

E. State Youth Leader – Hon Anozie Udenwa

F. Assistant State Legal Advisor – Barr Mrs Anyasinti Nwando

G. State Woman Leader – Hon Mrs Ijeoma Domike

H. State Assistant Treasurer – Mr Timothy Ezeribe

I. State Ex Officio – Mr Ben Nwabueze

The State Executive Council passed a resolution to empower the State Working Committee to fill any other vacant position after careful considerations and consultations, pending rectification by the SEC. Due to the absence of nominations, the position of the State Treasurer and State Publicity Secretary stepped down to enable the relevant Constituencies present nominations to the SWC subsequently.

Following the vacancy created by the demise of the Dr Alex Obi for the Imo slot of the South East member of the Board of Trustees of the People's Democratic Party, Chief Barr Chris Okewulonu was rectified as a member of BOT.

Following the resignation of the Chairman of the State Elders Committee from active politics, Prof Jude Njoku was rectified and approved as the Chairman of Imo PDP Elders Council.

Following the expiration of the tenure of the State Secretary of Elders Committee, Prof Obioma Iheduru was rectified and approved as the Secretary of Imo PDP Elders Council.

A member of the State Elders Committee, His Excellency, Rt Hon Emeka Ihedioha moved a motion

for the co-opting of 1 additional member per zone into the Elders Committee. The motion was seconded by the State Legal Advisor and was unanimously adopted without a dissenting voice.

A motion to query absentee LGA Party Chairmen was moved by the State Legal Advisor, Barr Kissinger Ikukwo and was Seconded by Rt Hon Okey Onyekanma. Motion was unanimously adopted.

In his concluding remarks, the National Vice Chairman (South East) of the People's Democratic Party, Chief Ali Odefa hailed Imo PDP over successful replacement of vacant positions. He confirmed that the process was constitutional while noting that the representative of the Zonal Youth Leader validated the votes and shall report same to the Zonal Executive Council.

In their separate remarks, the member representing Aboh Mbaize State Constituency in Imo State House of Assembly and the member representing Ahiazu Mbaize Ezinihite Federal Constituency in the House of Reps who doubles as the Caucus Leader of Imo PDP legislators, Hon Princewill Ugochukwu Amuchie and Rt. Hon Emeka Martins Chinedu respectively praised the party for the frantic ef-

orts made to rebuild the party.

A former Governor of the State, BOT member and NEC member of the party, His Excellency, Rt Hon Emeka Ihedioha CON, commended the State Working Committee for standing firm and focused despite the challenges faced in the last couple of months. He went ahead to commend members of the SEC for their desire and commitment towards ensuring that fresh life is injected into the party. He decried the efforts of a few disgruntled elements whose actions targeted at destabilizing the party has led to the unfortunate sack of Rt Hon Jonas Okeke and Hon Modestus Osakwe from seats they clearly won.

Gov. Ihedioha urged every stakeholder to go back to the grassroots to begin the rebuilding process of the party, while noting that indiscipline can no longer be condoned in the party.

He concluded by expressing his conviction that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

The First PDP Governor of Imo State and a revered leader of the party, His Excellency, Chief Achike Udenwa (Onwa) praised Engr Charles Ugwu for his inspiring leadership to the party.

Gov. Udenwa thanked the National and State Assembly

members for their support and solidarity to the party while encouraging them not to relent, while urging party members to work hard to make the party attractive while believing that the future emerges bright

Cash donations were made by Chief Achike Udenwa, Rt Hon Emeka Ihedioha, Chief Barr Chris Okewulonu, Hon Emeka Martins Chinedu, Hon Ugonna Ozuruigbo and Hon Ikeagwuonu Onyinye (Ikenga).

Closing Prayers by Prof Jude Njoku.

Some notable Members of the State Executive Council who were present at the meeting were;

H.E, Chief Achike Udenwa

H.E, Rt Hon Emeka Ihedioha CON

Chief Barr Chris Okewulonu (BOT Member)

Rt Hon Emeka Martins Chinedu (MHR, Caucus Leader)

Hon Princewill Ugochukwu Amuchie (Member Imo State House of Assembly)

RT Hon Uche Onyeagucha Chief Chinemerem Madu (National Officer)

Sir Stanley Ekezie (Zonal Officer)

Chief Austin Elochukwu Okeke (Zonal Officer)

Chief Henry Ekpe (Zonal Officer)

RT Hon Chuma Nnaji

RT. Hon Nnaemeka Mmaduagwu

RT Hon Jonas Okeke

RT Hon Lawman Duruji

RT Hon Okey Onyekanma

RT Hon Frank Ugboma

Hon Oliver Enwerenem

Prof Jude Njoku

Prof Obioma Iheduru

Hon Ugochukwu Nnawuihe

Chief Demian Ezeagu

Members of the State Working Committee

LGA Party Chairmen

State Assistants, Zonal Executive Members and other

Members of the SEC from across the three Senatorial

Districts too numerous to mention.



The break failed trailer that left one dead at Umunze-Ekwulobia road, in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Archbishop Tomash Peta dare Pope Francis: Rejects order on same-sex marriage blessing

Metropolitan archbishop has become the first prelate to issue guidance to his flock on the Vatican's declaration allowing same-sex blessings. In it he firmly prohibits priests and faithful from accepting or performing any form of blessing of couples in an irregular situation and same-sex couples.

In a statement dated December 19, and sent to all priests and parishes in his archdiocese, Archbishop Tomash Peta of Saint Mary in Astana, Kazakhstan, together with Auxiliary Bishop Athanasius Schneider, firmly

contend that the new declaration, Fiducia supplicans, is a "great deception", and that its proposed blessings of same-sex couples "directly and seriously contradict Divine Revelation and the uninterrupted, bimillennial doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church".

The declaration, issued on December 18 by Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith Prefect Cardinal Manuel Fernández, and signed by Pope Francis, claims to offer an "innovative contribution to the meaning of blessings" which allows the "possibility of blessing couples in irreg-

ular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage".

While affirming that the Church "does not have the power to impart blessings [proper to the sacrament of marriage] on unions of persons of the same sex", the declaration permits priests to offer a non-liturgical and "spontaneous pastoral blessing", i.e. a new category of blessing, to such couples.

In his statement responding to the declaration, Archbishop Peta, a native of

Poland, warns priests and faithful that "this effort to legitimize such blessings" will have "far-reaching and destructive consequences" and, at least in practice, turns the Catholic Church into a "propagandist" of "gender ideology".

Here below is the official English translation, from Russian, of the statement signed by Archbishop Tomash Peta and Bishop Athanasius Schneider.

Statement of the Archdiocese of Saint Mary in Astana regarding the Declaration Fiducia supplicans, published by the Dicastery of the Doc-

trine of Faith and approved by Pope Francis on December 18, 2023

The manifest purpose of the Declaration of the Holy See, Fiducia supplicans, is to allow "the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples". At the same time, the document insists that such blessings are performed "without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage".

The fact that the document does not give permission for the "marriage" of same-sex couples should not blind pas-

sors and faithful to the great deception and the evil that resides in the very permission to bless couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples.

Such a blessing directly and seriously contradicts Divine Revelation and the uninterrupted, bimillennial doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church. To bless couples in an irregular situation and same-sex couples is a serious abuse of the most Holy Name of God, since this name is invoked upon an objectively sinful union of adultery or of homosexual activity.

News

Residents lament as erosion ravages 169 Anambra communities

Several buildings, structures and roads have been destroyed, while over 100,000 persons have been displaced by the menace of gully erosion ravaging communities in Anambra State, South-East PUNCH can authoritatively report.

Findings revealed that some of the communities mostly ravaged by the disaster include: Oba community in Idemili South Local Government Area, Ozubulu in Ekwusigo Local Government Area, Onitsha Inland in Onitsha North Local Government Area, Awada, Nkpor and Obosi communities in Idemili North Local Government Area, as well as Atani and Okpoko communities in Ogbaru Local Government Area, among several others.

One of the roads currently being ravaged by the disaster is the Onitsha-Owerri Road, which has become a nightmare to road users, because the erosion devastation has completely cut off one lane of the ever busy road.

The Onitsha-Owerri Expressway connects other South-East states and some parts of the South-South and recently, a devastating erosion cut off one lane of the busy expressway at Oba community, and since the incident happened in July, 2023, it has become a nightmare for road users.

The Agulu-Nanka Road axis and Alor-Nnobi Road have also been badly affected by the disaster, a situation that has attracted both national and international visitors and several others to the plight of

road users.

Among the structures under serious erosion threat are the popular Rojeny Games Village, Tansian University, and a multi-million naira plastics company located in Oba, near the Onitsha-Owerri Road.

Already, churches, schools, shops and several residential buildings worth billions of naira, including several failed roads in the inner communities, have been destroyed completely by the erosion menace.

However, both the federal and state governments are tackling few of the erosion menace in the state, such as the one along the Onitsha-Owerri road and some other major roads in the state.

This is just as the state Commissioner for Environ-

ment, Felix Odimegwu, has disclosed that no fewer than 160 out of 179 communities in Anambra State are currently grappling with the imminent threat posed by erosion gullies.

Odimegwu disclosed this while speaking at an award night organised by the Nigerian Society of Engineers, Awka branch, recently.

Odimegwu averred that the ravaging erosion menace across the state is caused by actions and inactions of the residents, which he said require collective efforts and expertise to control.

Emphasising the urgent

need for collective action and expertise to mitigate the impact of the erosion menace, the commissioner added that negligence would undoubtedly continue exacerbating the environmental vulnerabilities.

He, however, applauded the ongoing rehabilitation works going on at some of the erosion sites, facilitated by the governor of the state, Chukwuma Soludo, and emphasised the positive strides made in the ministry.

He said, "No fewer than 160 out of 179 communities in Anambra State are currently grappling with the imminent threat posed by erosion

gullies.

"Environment is everybody's business. Looking at what is happening in the state today, the ecological problems we are facing, it is high time we all took responsibility for our actions and our inactions.

"And the engineers must play their roles and ensure the right thing is done at every point in time, especially in the areas of the design and construction of buildings, because unsustainable designs and unprofessional construction are parts of the major causes of these environmental challenges."

Nigerian Catholic Bishops reject Pope's same-sex marriage blessing order

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has said that blessing same-sex marriage is against God's law, the teachings of the Church, the laws of the country, and the cultural sensibilities of Nigerians.

The bishops stated this in a statement on Thursday in Ibadan. The statement was signed by CBCN President and Secretary, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji and Most Rev. Donatus Ogun respectively, and a few other executives. The bishops assured the 'people of God' that the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage remained the same.

"There is, therefore, no possibility in the church of blessing same-sex unions and activities; that will go against God's law, the teachings of the church, the laws of our nation, and the cultural sensibilities of our people. "We thank all the priests for their accompaniment of married couples, asking them to continue in all they do to sustain the sacrament of holy matrimony and never to do anything that will detract from the sacredness of this sacrament," CBCN said.

The bishops said following the issuance of the declaration on the pastoral meaning of blessings, "Fiducia Supplicans" (pleading with cour-

age) by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, CBCN members recognised their duties as pastors to clarify the content of the document.

They emphasized that the declaration sought to clarify the different forms of blessings that could be given to persons and objects within the Catholic Church, including the possibility of blessing persons in irregular unions. Such unions, the clerics said, could include, but not limited to, divorced and remarried couples whose previous marriages had not been annulled, those living in same-sex unions, those in polygamous unions, and concubinage, among others.

"The declaration acknowledges and carefully distinguishes between ritual, liturgical, and informal blessings. "While ritual or liturgical blessings are imparted according to the established norms of the church, informal blessings refer to prayers over people who ask for them outside the liturgy or any formal celebration in the church.

"The declaration offers a consideration of the possibility of extending the informal blessings to all God's children, irrespective of their moral condition, when they ask to be blessed.

"Nevertheless, the declara-

tion insists that the blessings of persons in irregular unions – and never the union itself – can only take a non-liturgical form to avoid confusion. "It should not be imparted during or in connection with a civil wedding ceremony or with clothing, words, and signs associated with a wedding," they said.

According to the bishops, the declaration also reiterates the Catholic Church's perennial teaching on marriage as an "exclusive, stable and indissoluble union of a man and woman, naturally open to the generation of children."

While stating that the church did not have the power to impart a blessing on irregular unions, they maintained that the declaration also reinforced the truth about God's mercy.

"For one to willingly ask for a blessing demonstrates one's trust in God and the desire to live according to God's commandments.

"Asking for God's blessing is not dependent on how good one is. Imperfection is the reason for seeking God's grace.

"Therefore, those in irregular unions are invited never to lose hope but rather to ask for God's grace and mercy while remaining open to conversion," the bishops said.



(Middle) Public Relations Officer Anambra NSCDC Command, SC Okadigbo Edwin being decorated at the command office at Awka, Anambra State.

Imo Fed Reps Seat: Appeal Court sacks PDP's OZB, declares APC's Nwadike winner

The Appeal Court have sacked the Peoples Democratic Party PDP candidate in the Nkwere, Njaba, Nwangele, Isu Federal Constituency election, Hon. Ugonna Ozuruigbo (OZB) and declared the All Progressives Congress APC candidate,

Barr. Harrison Nwadike as the winner of the election.

Ozuruigbo who was declared winner of the election by the Independent National Electoral Commission INEC, had earlier defeated Nwadike at the election petition tribunal.

With the ruling by the Ap-

peal Court, the legal battle surrounding the seat finally comes to an end.

Ozuruigbo who entered the seat in 2019 was on his way for a second term in office before the Appeal Court quashed his hopes.

Ozuruigbo who was of the political family of former governor Rochas Okorocha, refused to bow to Gov. Hope Uzodinma's leadership of the party, and defected to the PDP before the 2023 General Elections where he clinched the party's ticket.

DMO reveals Nigeria's debt profile hits N87.9trn

The Debt Management Office (DMO) said Nigeria's total public debt as at September 30, 2023 was N87.91trn or \$114.3

The DMO, in a statement on Wednesday, stated that the amount represented domestic and external debts of the Federal Government, the 36 state governments and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

The debt office said the debt stock represented a marginal increase of 0.61% when compared to the June 30, 2023 figure of N87.38trn.

"This trend is explained by the decrease in External Debt from USD43.16 Billion as at June 30, 2023 to USD41.59 Billion as at September 30, 2023 and a relatively moder-

ate increase of N1.80 Trillion in the Domestic Debt," the statement partly read.

"External Debt decreased due to a redemption of a USD500 million Eurobond and the payment of USD413.859 million as first principal repayment of the USD3.4 Billion Loan obtained from the International Monetary Fund in 2020 during Covid-19.

"The servicing of these Debts in addition to other Debts, are clear demonstrations of the FGN's commitment to honouring its debt obligations. Notwithstanding, Mr. President's initiatives and actions towards revenue generation remain important for Nigeria's overall fiscal balance."

Ndom Chinyeremaka Umu-Ihugba Umuodu Owerri offers life benefits to aged members

By Ikenna Orioha

To celebrate excellence, selfless service to humanity, a social cultural group, Ndom Chinyeremaka Umu-Ihugba Umuodu autonomous community, Owerri Municipal, has given out life benefits to her aged members who are 90 years of age and above.

The gesture tagged Orinandu (celebration of life) which also marked the End of the Year Meeting of Ndom Chinyeremaka Umu-Ihugba Umuodu, was

held at Ihugba Street, Owerri, on Wednesday, amid fanfare.

People of worth in the community graced the event with the women colourfully uniformly dressed.

Speaking to our reporter, the President - General of Ndom Chinyeremaka Umu-Ihugba Umuodu, Golden Mother Justina Patty Ogorma, stated that under her leadership, the women unanimously decided to celebrate their aged members who are 90 years and above while they are

alive for their love, fairness, devotion and sacrifices towards the growth, advancement and sustenance of the association by way of given out life benefits to them.

Golden Mother Ogorma said they are happy to have respectfully remembered, celebrated and offered life benefits to these aged members, saying the 13 of them were given items such as assorted fishes, tubers of yam, each worthing about #15000, stressing that it is a thing of joy that the aged members were given the

honor they deserve.

While adding that the gesture had increased their happiness, strengthened their veins, as well as spurred others to offer selfless services to the association and humanity entirely, Ogorma prayed that those who will succeed the current leadership should have the gut and thought to sustain the Orinandu Initiative to encourage selfless service in Ndom Chinyeremaka Umu-Ihugba Umuodu autonomous community, Owerri Municipal Local Government.

Commentary

Induced apathy killing Nigerians softly and slowly

By Akpandem James

Something dangerously wrong seems to have happened to our feelings as Nigerians. We seem to have lost our sense of humanity. We are hardly pushed by happenings that do not have direct consequences or immediate threats to our respective existences. Our ability to respond to common threats seems to be tainted by primordial considerations. Even when there is a development that portends mass destruction of the people, it is discussed as routine and dismissed with some level of disdain. Mindless religiosity, intemperate clannishness and blind political partisanship have deadened our sense of appreciation and reduced rationality to relative terms.

Recently, a team from the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) in the South-East zone reportedly “uncovered” more than 240 factories in a market in Aba, Abia State, where fake drinks of various brands and descriptions are manufactured. Only ten people were said to have been arrested in what they wanted the public to believe was a sting operation. Going by the volume of poisonous beverages brewed in those shacks and the level of revelry among Nigerians, it is better left to imagine the level of havoc wrecked on the health of unsuspecting members of the public by this illegal practice. This is nothing short of mass poisoning because no type of beverage was spared: alcoholic, non-alcoholic, therapeutic or outright medicinal.

Reactions from various quarters to the trending videos of the Aba Market raid are so tepid that it could be assumed that nothing serious happened. From the public and the government, the episode is treated as nothing to really worry about. Arresting criminals producing substances of mass destruction, who ordinarily should be treated as terrorists, are just generally being discussed as one of those things the people are forced to live with.

The perpetrators are treated as just everyday criminals. At the end of it, they might get released unconditionally following interventions from vested interests, they could escape from lawful custody or be given a gentle slap on the wrist by conniving agents within the criminal justice system. In no time, they will return to the business, either in the same location or somewhere else. It happens all the time because there are no deterrent consequences.

NAFDAC has the statutory responsibility of regulating and controlling the importation, exportation, manufacture, advertisement, distribution, sale and use of drugs, cosmetics, medical devices, bottled water and chemicals in Nigeria. Given its clearly stated responsibilities, NAFDAC should have a very active and diligent intelligence and surveillance arm to facilitate the effective discharge of its core functions. It likely has, but it is doubtful if such is active; otherwise, fake food and drug manufacturers who are scattered all over the country would not have the level of free space they are currently enjoying. It doesn't seem to be the same NAFDAC of the Dora Akunyili era.

NAFDAC shares similar attributes with the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON). They have almost similar responsibilities, only differing in scope and coverage areas. SON is statutorily empowered “to organise tests, investigate the quality of facilities, materials and products, ensure reference standards for calibration and verification of measures and measuring instruments, and register and regulate standard marks and specifications.” It is to administer and enforce the provisions of the Act that established it. With the proliferation of fake and substandard goods all over the place, SON may just be one of the statistical monuments dotting the Federal Government landscape and nothing more fundamentally relevant.

It should be worrisome that a legion of government departments and agencies, with specific mandates for curbing the activities of lawless entities, exist largely to perform routine duties. The Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) have displayed commendable flashes of activity, no doubt, but they still need to do more in the face of current realities. The entire Nigerian landscape is littered with other government agencies that can appropriately be charged and found guilty of corporate malfeasance.

It is most unfortunate that the recent Aba Market exercise, which ordinarily should elicit mass revolt against both the perpetrators of the act and the sloppy attitude of those responsible for curbing the situation, is still being discussed as 'one of those things.' Within the same period, what attracted more attention and vehemence from the people were the emerging developments in the political crisis in Rivers State, fostered by the sour relationship between the immediate past governor, Barrister Nyesom Wike and his successor, Mr Siminalayi Fubara. The latter is a restricted matter that can be resolved through deft political manoeuvring, but the effect of the former is capable of slowly wiping out a generation of people across a larger space.

The way this very disturbing development is being seen and treated speaks to our priorities: politics, religion, region, health and humanity. It glaringly shows that we would rather die playing politics than live to save and serve humanity. The act by the Aba “brewers” and their ilk all over the country is most despicable, but the laxity of those charged with the responsibility of denying them the space to fester has become typical of our corporate and individual attitudes toward responsibilities.

Nigerians would rather complain and bemoan how things have degenerated in the country, but very few seem to take stock of their own sense of responsibility. People are now seized by an uncanny sense of entitlement, even when they are patently undeserving because of their very dispositions. It is disturbing that otherwise very condemnable actions are justified by some people, apparently triggered by hate and buoyed by sentiments.

Morals have gone to the dogs,

and there seems to be a meltdown in societal values. What on God's green earth runs in the minds of people who deliberately bottle poison and massively market it for material benefits? How do they enjoy such money? And they believe that they could prosper from such wicked ways? No wonder the Bible says, in Jeremiah 17:9, that 'the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?'

The consequences of this indulgence are legion – both to health and to the economy. There is a high traffic of Nigerians in medical facilities across the globe, who are suffering from kidney, liver and cancer afflictions. This might explain why kidney markets are sprouting everywhere and being served by equally mindless people and entities. That is why hospital theatres witness an influx of patients with liver problems. That is why stories of heart failures abound. That is why the rate of cancer afflictions has become so common that malaria is no longer an issue in our clime. Yet, those who contribute to these afflictions are still being treated as petty criminals, and those who have the responsibility of stemming their nefarious activities are carrying on with business as usual.

Various studies have shown that the incidence of chronic kidney disease (CKD) and cirrhosis of the liver has become commonplace in the country. The prevalence of CKD among Nigerians is reported to be in the region of between 1.6 per cent and 12.4 per cent. Because of the level of illiteracy and the shortage of handling facilities, the mortality rate in the country now floats between 40 per cent and 50 per cent. More than one thousand cases of liver cirrhosis are said to be reported in a year. Hepatitis and chronic alcohol abuse are named as frequent causes of liver cirrhosis. Some studies indicate that the liver damage caused by cirrhosis is often irreversible.

There is also an alarming increase in the cases of stomach ulcers, some of which might be accentuated by the consumption of corrosive liquids bottled and sold as beverages by mindless profiteers. This type of ulcer is said to occur when the stomach acid damages the lining of the digestive tract and produces open sores. Cancer cases are also on the rise and so are diseases of other sensitive organs of the body. Some of these ailments are worsened by the consumption of fake beverages, which

further pile pressure on sensitive organs.

In a country where healthcare facilities are lacking and very expensive where available, issues capable of further worsening the health conditions of the people should ordinarily be given top priority attention. Any form of sabotage should not only be frowned upon but promptly and decisively dealt with. But it doesn't seem so! Even when those who are charged with the responsibility of ensuring these are unmindful of their responsibilities and the perpetrators are having a field day, while those likely to unwittingly become victims do not seem to be concerned enough. The display of impunity and apathy on all fronts is very unbecoming in an otherwise rational society.

On the economic front, the manufacturers of consumer goods are folding up or moving out in droves because the counterfeiting of their products has made business bad for them. Unfortunately, these profiteers do not pay taxes, yet they drive tax-paying entities out of business. This is bad for the economy, the people and the country.

While NAFDAC is celebrating the feat of uncovering a commonplace activity that has been going on for decades, some people are dismissing the indulgence by evildoers as a sign of the time. What is happening at the Aba cemetery market is just a fraction of what is going on across the country. Nothing is spared. More disturbing is the infiltration of the entire consumables market, including common foodstuffs and fruits, whose maturity and volume are now chemically aided. These things are going on in the open, yet corporate laxity is flagrantly displayed by agencies responsible for dealing with them.

Deservedly, darts are being thrown in the direction of these agencies, even if feeble. Commentators are particularly 'dragging' NAFDAC, following the viral video of the sordid “discovery.” NAFDAC, SON and related agencies deserve not only 'dragging' but also bloodying, but the evildoers deserve to be crucified. Their acts should be treated as crimes against humanity and the state. The cumulative consequence of their actions is nothing but the gradual mass killing of the most painful nature. In Nigeria today, quite unfortunately, where massive outrage is expected, sentiments pour cold water and reduce a fundamental conversation to tantrums.

“ *On the economic front, the manufacturers of consumer goods are folding up or moving out in droves because the counterfeiting of their products has made business bad for them. Unfortunately, these profiteers do not pay taxes, yet they drive tax-paying entities out of business. This is bad for the economy, the people and the country.* ”

Special Report

50 percent Travelers Transport Fee Cut-off: FG release route list, Transport Companies

In the spirit of the 2023 Yuletide season, the Federal Government on Wednesday rolled out programmes aimed at reducing the effect of rising inter-state transportation fares across the country.

To this end, the government at the centre announced rebate for commercial road and rail transportation across 28 luxury bus routes and three railway corridors nationwide.

Briefing newsmen at the State House, Abuja, Chairman of the Inter-ministerial Committee on presidential intervention and Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Mr. Dele Alake, disclosed that President Bola Tinubu has approved a 50 percent rebate in inter-state land transportation fare across 28 luxurious bus routes nationwide from December 21, 2023 to January 4, 2024.

According to him, the President also okayed zero fare for train commuters along Lagos-Ibadan, Abuja-Kaduna and Warri-Itakpe corridors within the same period. He said all the logistics required for the implementation of the programme have been worked out between the Minister of Transportation and the transport unions and luxurious buses owners. According to him, "In the spirit of Christmas and the end of year festivities, President Bola Tinubu, in another demonstration of his love for Nigerians, has approved that the Federal Government should intervene to bring down the cost of public transportation to allow our compatriots who want to travel to visit their loved ones and hometowns to do so without stress and the extra burden imposed by the high cost of transport around this period.

"The President is well aware of the recent increase in cost of inter-state transportation and even for air travel. Traditionally, our people love to travel during Christmas and end of year to be with families and friends and this has been the practice for ages. "We also know that globally, intra-country travels and movement of people, goods and services always peak around Christmas and end of the year because of socio-gravitational pull of the period which transporters always cash on to increase fares astronomically.

"In recognition of the economic situation of the country which he is working very hard to turn around, President Tinubu wants Nigerians to be able to travel within

Nigeria to wherever they want to go to meet their loved ones without the extra-burden of paying exorbitantly for inter-state public transportation.

"It is in this wise that the Federal Government is announcing, beginning from tomorrow, a special discounted holiday season fare on road transport and zero-fare by rail across Nigeria.

"What this means is that from tomorrow, Nigerians willing to travel can board public transport via minibuses, luxury buses at 50% discount of current cost and all our train services on the routes the trains currently serve at zero cost to and from their travels this holiday season.

"This special presidential intervention will commence tomorrow Thursday, December 21. It will end on January 4, 2024.

"The Federal Government through the Ministry of Transportation will be working with transporters, road transport unions, Nigerian Railway Corporation to seamlessly deliver on this special presidential initiative.

"From tomorrow, Nigerians wishing to embark on inter-state travel to any part of the country from Abuja, Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Owerri, Ibadan, Akure, Maiduguri, Sokoto and other major inter-state transportation hubs will be able to do so at half the cost.

"The Federal Government under the leadership of President Tinubu is working very hard to make sure Nigerians have a memorable and happy holiday season".

Alake further announced that necessary necessary security arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the transportation arrangement work according to schedule.

His words: "The President has already directed the Police, Department of State Services, the Military and other security agencies to work collaboratively to ensure the holiday period is safe without any security breach in any part of the country. "While we wish all Nigerians a great holiday season, we implore everyone to be law abiding, be security conscious, be our brother's keepers, extend every goodwill to our families, friends and neighbours. We should continue to work within our sphere of influence to make our country the very best we all desire her to be".

Justifying government's involvement of luxurious Bus Unions in executing the programme, Minister for Transportation, Saedu Alkali, told reporters that the

government partnered with transport companies operating these formats following their well organised structures across the country.

According to him: "Why we decided to use luxury buses union is because they are more organised and more structured. So we held a meeting with the president of the union and they gave us an idea on how much they charge on a normal day but during festive period when the buses travel, they return empty and it is on that account that they have to increase the fair during festivities. That has been taken into account. We held several meetings with Mr. President".

He further explained that government considered prevailing security situation in the country hence it's consideration for 50 percent reduction in road transport.

"And why we decided to have 50 percent for the land transport, you see when you have this kind of initiative or programme to implement, you have to be mindful of the security situation. If you say it's for free, even those that did not intend to travel will just go to the park and say I want to travel. But with this 50%, they have the ticketing system.

"So for those who intend to travel, the federal government will provide 50 percent for them. They do one trip daily, we are going to maintain that", Alkali further said.

Also speaking, Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, said Nigerians should expect more of such interventions from President Tinubu during national holidays.

According to him, the 50 per cent reduction in the cost of road

transportation during this year's Yuletide season would not be a one-off intervention by the President.

Said he: "I just want to add that this is part of the measures that President Bola Tinubu intends to be doing, this is not a one-off thing and even though this is targeted at Christmas, the President will continue to review situations especially during national holidays like this and see what kind of interventions can come subsequently going forward".

THE 28 ROAD TRANSPORT ROUTES

The 28 luxury bus daily routes effective December 21, 2023 include Lagos-Kano,

Lagos-Abuja, Lagos-Kaduna-Zaria, Lagos-Jos, Lagos-Enugu, Lagos-Onitsha, Lagos-Owerri, Lagos-Aba, Lagos-Abakaliki, Lagos-Nsukka, Lagos-Uyo, Lagos-Port Harcourt, Onitsha-Kano and Onitsha-Lagos.

Others include Onitsha-Jos, Onitsha-Abuja, Onitsha-Sokoto, Onitsha-Gombe, Onitsha-Zakibiam, Port Harcourt-Owerri-Aba-Kano, Aba-Owerri-Abuja, Aba-Lagos, Abuja-Sokoto, Abuja-Lagos, Abuja-Onitsha-Owerri-Port Harcourt, Abuja-Enugu/Abakaliki, Abuja-Gombe and Abuja-Kano.

THE 5 CHOSEN BUS COMPANIES

Participating companies in the FG's plan to reduce the transport burden of travelling Nigerians include:

1. GIG (God is Good)
2. Chisco Transport
3. Young Shall Grow
4. God Bless Ezenwata
5. Area Motor

"The President is well aware of the recent increase in cost of inter-state transportation and even for air travel. Traditionally, our people love to travel during Christmas and end of year to be with families and friends and this has been the practice for ages. "We also know that globally, intra-country travels and movement of people, goods and services always peak around Christmas and end of the year because of socio-gravitational pull of the period which transporters always cash on to increase fares astronomically."



How my ex-wife made me lose properties, access to kids – Emeka Ike

Veteran Nollywood actor Emeka Ike has narrated how his estranged wife Suzanne Emma's allegations made him lose his properties and access to his kids.

Recalls that a Lagos Island Customary Court in 2017 dissolved the marriage between Emeka Ike and his wife over incessant battery.

Emma had on July 13, 2015, approached the court to dissolve the 14-year-old marriage between her and the Nollywood actor.

The marriage produced four children.

While featuring as a guest on Channels Television programme Rubbin' Minds, hosted by Hero Daniels, Ike said his ex-wife's assault allegations made him lose properties worth millions of naira.

He said he did not come out to clear the air over the domestic violence allegations against him because the people "bullying" him were on social media.

Ike said, "I didn't come on the internet space to clarify the allegations against me because it's difficult to clarify because the same people that were bullying me on the internet, they were still there. They are gonna say, 'Don't mind him. He is still missing her. Move on.'"

"And if you're not prepared to handle it, you will be crushed. My secondary school, St. Nicholas College, on CMD road, Magodo, was shut down. Over N480 million investment that year was shut down. And all I heard was constant battery. I was like, 'I don't



Emeka Ike

beat this lady. What's going on? Babe, what's going on? They said I beat you, do I?"

"And she [my ex-wife] said, 'No. But you're a star, you know, they can always manipulate things and all that.' So, I was gullible until I discovered that she was actually the one behind all this whole thing. Some ladies are too desperate for marriage legally. And she actually told me one time that I am not the marriage type. And I didn't understand it. So, the young men need to know that there are plenty ladies that are not the marriage type lately."

He said he sponsored his ex-wife's higher education but didn't know that he wasn't "loved in return."

The thespian said he and his family members begged his ex-wife not to divorce him, but she was adamant.

"She [my ex-wife] went to divorce herself. She said, 'Judge, please, divorce me, I want to go.' I said, 'Kilode? Where are you going?' I was on my knees. Felix Duke was on his knees. My sisters were on their knees in court. Even the people that came with my ex-wife to court were on their knees. They said, 'Are you okay? What's wrong with you?' We didn't understand what was going on in her psychology," he recalled.

Ike said he believed his ex-wife was blackmailed by some "gunmen" she was involved with into divorcing him.



Burna Boy

Burna Boy explains why Nigerians hate him

Grammy-winning Nigerian singer Damini Ogulu, popularly known as Burna Boy, has revealed why he is "hated" in the music industry.

According to him, he is hated by his "inferiors" for having no "superiors."

The controversial singer posted this on his X handle on Saturday when he wrote, "Hated by my inferiors for having no superiors," while sharing a photo of himself.

Recall that Burna Boy has repeatedly claimed that he is hated by Nigerians.

In 'Thank You', a track from his recent album, I Told Them, Burna Boy insinuated that Nigerians don't appreciate him enough despite making the country proud "every chance I get."

He said instead of Nigerians appreciating his invaluable musical contributions to the nation, they spread rumours that his mother was one of the dancers of the late Afrobeat pioneer, Fela Kuti, and that impotency might be the reason he doesn't have a baby mama like most of his colleague.

... I play Burna Boy's songs the most – England Women Coach, Sarina Wiegman

England women's national football team head coach, Sarina Wiegman has revealed her most played song of 2023 on Spotify.

The Three Lionesses boss was asked about her Spotify wrapped in a chat with Sky Sports and she revealed that Nigerian singer, Burna Boy's collaborative hit with British superstar Ed Sheeran, 'For My Hand' is her most played song of the year.

"I didn't expect this so I don't know the name of the song, But it is the song with Burna Boy and Ed Sheeran. I definitely played that song the most," the Dutch tactician said.

'For My Hand' was one of the standout tracks from Burna Boy's sixth studio album, 'Love, Damini,' which was released in 2022.

The song has surpassed 160 million streams on Spotify.

'God help me' – Tiwa Savage cries for help as she reveals ill health

Popular Nigerian singer, Tiwa Savage has announced that she is down with sickness.

The singer said she has two pending shows but isn't feeling well enough.

On her Instagram page, Savage wrote: "God help me, have two shows today and I feel soo sick."

In another post, the mother of

one said she needs "tender loving care."

She wrote, "Who loves me enough to send me cheesecake ice cream? I need some tender loving care."

Recall that Tiwa Savage had in October postponed all her performances, saying she has been "instructed to be on strict vocal rest for the next few months."



Tiwa Savage

I don't believe in God – Seun Kuti

Popular Afrobeat singer, Seun Kuti, has revealed that he does not believe in God.

Seun made this known in an interview with Hiptv on Friday.

According to him, he does not believe in the concept that God created the world.

"I don't believe in God. I don't believe in the concept of this guy watching everyone's and he will judge you when you die.

"I don't believe in the concept

that people believe in God. I don't believe that there is something responsible for the creation of the world.

"I mean who wants to create this? If someone actually created this, are we supposed to be giving the person credit?"

"80 percent of human beings are living in hunger and we are supposed to be his most prized possession. There is something but not the way we are told that it is."



Seun Kuti

I was responsible for breakup with my ex-wife – Actor Bolanle

Popular Nollywood actor Bolanle Ninalowo has accepted responsibility for his failed marriage with his estranged wife, Bunmi.

Recall that the actor on September 1, 2023, announced that he and his wife are going their separate ways and headed for an "irreconcil-

able marriage dissolution".

Speaking in a recent interview with TVC, Ninalowo admitted being "mostly responsible" for the breakup between him and his wife.

The host, Hojay asked: "Were you mostly responsible for breakup between you and your wife?"



Bolanle and his ex

How my ex-wife made me lose properties, access to kids – Emeka Ike

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Emeka Ike

SPORTS



Osimhen can lead Eagles to AFCON glory – Nwakali

Chaves midfielder, Kelechi Nwakali, feels with Victor Osimhen the Super Eagles have a squad capable of matching any side for the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations title in Ivory Coast, PUNCH Sports Extra reports.

The new African Footballer of The Year, Osimhen will make a return to the Eagles for the tournament after missing the team's World Cup qualifiers against Lesotho and Zimbabwe in November due to a hamstring injury.

The Eagles on their part head into the AFCON tournament in a rather confident mood with a seven-game unbeaten record (four wins and three draws) and are up against host Equatorial Guinea Ivory Coast and Guinea-Bissau in Group A.

Nwakali who has been included in the provisional squad for the 34th edition of the competition said while the Eagles' versatility and quality are clear to see, consistency will be key to any success in Ivory Coast.

"This time around, the Eagles will have Victor (Osimhen), he can lead the team to the AFCON title. He is

the best striker in the world at the moment.

"I believe our squad is capable in any given game of matching any team. But obviously, it's one thing having that and another being able to do that consistently throughout a tournament.

"We've got players who can play anywhere in so many positions. You never know with the players we've got how well they can do. We've had a good qualifying campaign, but we need to make sure that we don't slack, that we keep going and keep pushing forward, and give ourselves every possible chance."

The 25-year-old has been used as a central midfielder by Chaves coach Joao Moreno this season and has made three assists in 15 appearances this season.

Speaking on his preferred role, he said, "As a player, you are always adapting.

"You adapt to your teammates, you adapt to the different coaches you are working under. It depends on what the coaches want from you.



Osimhen

"Throughout my career, I've adapted to different situations and different teams I've played in, and I have no problem doing it. In football, you need players who can play in different positions. I've always felt like I can play in different positions. But I've always believed I am capable of playing in different positions.

"To have players like that in your squad is important.

Nwakali, who has made only four



Super Eagles

2023 AFCON: Ivorian legend Drogba wary of Super Eagles threat

Cote d'Ivoire legend Didier Drogba has reckoned the Super Eagles will be a tough nut to crack for the Elephants at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations.

The hosts will face the three-time winners in their second Group C game at the Alhassane Quattara Stadium, Ebimpe, Abidjan, on January 18.

Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau are the other teams in the group. The top two teams in the group are guaranteed a place in the Round of 16. Drogba reckoned that the Super Eagles are a

big team that will pose a problem for his countrymen.

"There's no such thing as a generous draw because all the teams deserve to be here, and they're going to fight," Drogba, who scored 65 goals for the Elephants, told the BBC.

"Nigeria, with Victor Osimhen and all the players they have, is a big team. We mustn't forget the other two teams because there are always surprises."

The 2023 AFCON finals will run from January 13 to February 11.

UEFA court defeat revives battle with breakaway Super League

The promoters of a Super League announced plans for a new breakaway competition on Thursday after the EU's top court ruled that UEFA had used illegal tactics to stifle a previous project.

The European Court of Justice ruling did not constitute an endorsement of the Super League idea, which still faces furious opposition from many football fans and from Europe's existing national leagues.

But it marks a serious legal setback for UEFA and for soccer's world governing body FIFA, finding that their tactic of threatening to ban future Super League clubs and players from taking part in their competitions broke EU law.

And it was seized upon by the promoters of the Super League project, A22 Sports Management, to promote their vision of a new 64-team tournament that would feature promotion and relegation and would be broadcast live for free "on a new streaming platform".

"The FIFA and UEFA rules

making any new interclub football project subject to their prior approval, such as the Super League, and prohibiting clubs and players from playing in those competitions, are unlawful," the ECJ ruled.

Because UEFA operates as a monopoly in setting the rules, while also organising tournaments of its own such as the Champions League, its criteria for authorising rival competitions should be "transparent, objective, non-discriminatory and proportionate".

"However, the powers of FIFA and UEFA are not subject to any such criteria. FIFA and UEFA are, therefore, abusing a dominant position," the court ruled.

The planned Super League project has been mothballed since it collapsed in early 2021 amid fan fury at the threat it posed to national league competitions, but after the ruling, the promoters claimed victory and promised rapid announcements.

"We have won the right to compete. The UEFA monopoly is over. Football is free," the firm's CEO Bernd Reichart declared in a social media post from the A22 account.

"Clubs are now free from the threat of sanction and free to determine their own futures."

But UEFA chose to emphasise a different part of the ECJ judgment, stressing that the ruling "does not signify an endorsement or validation of" the breakaway competition.

UEFA went on: "It rather underscores a pre-existing shortfall within UEFA's pre-authorisation framework, a technical aspect that has already been acknowledged and addressed in June 2022.

"UEFA is confident in the robustness of its new rules, and specifically that they comply with all relevant European laws and regulations."

Many football fans fear that a closed, US-style league with no promotion or relegation of clubs will destroy the hopes of glory for smaller teams and the prestige of beloved national competitions.

Football Supporters Europe (FSE), an umbrella lobby group also spoke out, saying, "Since 2021, FSE and fans across Europe have stood firm against a breakaway super league time and time again, and repeatedly called for the greater pro-

tection of our game.

"Whatever comes next, the Super League remains an ill-conceived project that endangers the future of European football. FSE, our members, and fans across Europe will continue to fight it."

The case goes back to April 2021, when 12 of Europe's biggest clubs announced they had signed up for the planned Super League, a direct competitor to UEFA's flagship competition the Champions League, which features the most successful clubs from Europe's various national leagues.

The upstart league quickly fell apart in the face of a strong backlash from supporters and both UEFA

and the world body FIFA threatened to take disciplinary action against the clubs involved.

English fans in particular remained loyal to their traditional domestic league model and nine of the 12 rebel clubs — including six from the English Premier League — threw in the towel within 48 hours.

Two years on, only Spanish giants Real Madrid and Barcelona have stood by the dormant project, with Italian giant Juventus withdrawing in July.

Real Madrid's chairman Florentino Perez hailed Thursday's court decision, declaring that: "European club football will no longer be a monopoly."

But the club's current parent league, La Liga, denounced the Super League idea as "a selfish and elitist model"



European Court of Justice.