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News

Police rescue 4 siblings abducted by gunmen in Anambra

Police in Anambra State have rescued four children of the same parents, who were abducted from their homes by kidnapers on Friday night.

Anambra State Police Command spokesperson DSP Tochukwu Ikenga said the children were taken from Enugwu Agidi in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State.

He said: "On 15th December 2023 at about 2300, the Police at Abagana received information via Police hotline that suspected

herdsmen had abducted four children from a family at Achalla Village, Enugwu Agidi in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State.

"Immediately the Commissioner of Police, CP Aderemi Adeoye, received the report, he ordered the immediate mobilisation of Police personnel and vigilantes to go after the kidnapers with a view to rescuing the children.

"In the early hours of today, Saturday, 16th December 2023, the four chil-

dren aged 13, 14, 21 and 21 years were rescued close to Urum, 25 kilometres away from their home in Achalla village, Enugwu-Agidi.

"The children have been reunited with their parents while the dragnet for the armed herdsmen is being extended to neighbouring communities."

Speaking on how the children were kidnapped, Ikenga said the mother of the children said the family was watching television at about 10 pm when electricity sud-

denly went out.

She and her husband went out to find out what was amiss when they saw three gunmen suspected to be herdsmen and fled for dear lives.

By the time they summoned the courage to return to the house, they discovered that their four children, who were already asleep, had been abducted by the gunmen.

Ikenga said security had been beefed up in the area to forestall a recurrence.

Enugu to reopen one lane of collapsed Enugu-Port Harcourt expressway bridge on Dec. 24

The Enugu State Government has announced that it will reopen one lane of the Enugu-Port Harcourt expressway collapsed bridge for use by December 24.

This was disclosed by Gerald Otiji, the Enugu State Commissioner for Works, while briefing newsmen after the State Executive Council meeting held at the Government House, Enugu on Friday.

Recall that Nairametrics in November reported that Gov. Peter Mbah announced that the Federal Government would commence reconstruction work on the collapsed Enugu-Port-Harcourt Expressway bridge on November 10.

The commissioner revealed that the reason why the Enugu State Government want to reopen one lane of the Enugu-Port-Harcourt Expressway bridge is to prevent trucks from driving through the state capital city.

In September, a bridge between the New Artisan

and New Triangle section of the Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway in Enugu collapsed.

Thereafter, lawmakers of the Enugu State House of Assembly called on the Federal Government to take action to work on the collapsed bridge to ease the difficulties of road users caused by the bridge collapse.

The Federal Government heeded the call and reconstruction work on the collapsed Enugu-Port-Harcourt Expressway bridge kicked off on Friday, November 10.

The governor had announced that the palliative work on the collapsed bridge would begin on one lane of the bridge that was still standing to ensure it was ready for use within 10 days of November 10.

Minister Umahi, who was present at the commencement of the reconstruction work of the bridge said funds for the project were covered in the 2023 Supplementary Budget.

Gov. Mbah lauds civil servants professionalism, pledges better welfare

Gov. Peter Mbah of Enugu State has expressed satisfaction with the enhanced performance of civil servants in the past 200 days of his administration of the state. Mbah made the commendation on Friday, in Enugu, during the grand finale of the 2023 Enugu State Civil Servants Week.

The governor reassured workers in the state of continuous better welfare package under his administration.

He said emphasis had now shifted from work attendance to productivity in order to achieve a sustainable economy, make the state an investment hub and actualize the proposed \$30 billion gross domestic product.

Mbah lauded the workers for their professionalism and for keying into the vision of the administration by their cooperation and team spirit.

The governor was represented by the Secretary to the State Government, Prof. Chidiebere Onyia.

He noted that the achievements the administration had recorded over the past 200 days were enabled by their resilient spirit, partnership with the authority and commitment to deliver.

"The governor wants me to remind you that without your level of professionalism, it will be very difficult to achieve what we have set out to do.

"On this note, he asked me to remind you that the professionalism he has seen in his first 200 days in office should continue to be reflected in the next four years," he said.

The theme of the Civil Service Week, "Innovating the Future Public Service: New Government Model for a New Era to Reach the SDGs," the governor said his administration was intentional in meeting the demands and needs of workers.

This, he said, included enabling a conducive working environment, incentives, training and increment of salaries and emoluments, stressing that such gestures

were to ensure optimal productivity that would take the state to the next level of development.

"One of the demands that had been an issue for years was that there was no power supply at the secretariat, and that they would like to have a conducive working environment to be able to do their work as professionals.

"I am happy that the Head of Service has announced that there is now power restored at the secretariat building.

"The second thing that we talked about was the issue of providing security and ensuring that the lives of Enugu citizens are sacrosanct in our push to grow the economy.

"I am happy to announce that since His Excellency came into office and abolished the sit-at-home order, there has been no insecurity incident in Enugu till today, 200 days in office," he said.

He added that, "the third thing is the improvement in the welfare of workers. I am here to announce that His Excellency has approved the promotion of workers that are due, and the process has begun.

"In addition to that, a couple of days back, he approved the N25,000 and N10,000 wage bill increase for state and local government workers respectively, one of the states that has made that effort in Nigeria," he added.

Gov. Nwifuru promises to prioritise elders', widows' welfare

By David Eze, Abakaliki

Governor Francis Nwifuru of Ebonyi state has assured that his administration will continue to prioritise the welfare of the elderly people and widows in the state

in line with his social contract.

Governor Nwifuru gave the assurance on Saturday at the Christian Ecumenical Centre, Abakaliki, during Elders and Widows Party organised at his instance

The governor reiterated his stance on bettering the lots of people especially the elders, widows and other less privileged.

The essence of the People's Charter of Needs, he explained is to ensure an effective target mechanism that will eliminate leakages in the course of reaching out to the socio-economically disadvantaged. He stated that his government will continue to honour the elderly and widows.

"We understand that when we honour our parents, God will honour us", he averred. The governor acknowledged the current economic realities and their attendant effects on the widows and elderly and pledged an upward review of their upkeep. "Let me assure you that I am with you, I am for you and I will work for you". "We have taken a review of your allowances which is why we reviewed it upward".

He stressed the need for strict adherence to time, saying, "We have a tradition of keeping to time".

Imo State Commissioner for Tourism reassures public of security ahead of festive

The Imo State Commissioner for Tourism, Rev Jerry Egbele Egemba, has addressed concerns regarding the security situation in the state, assur-

ing residents and visitors of a safe environment as the Christmas and New Year celebrations approach.

In a press release personally signed by Rev Egemba, he refuted claims of heightened insecurity, attributing such perceptions to individuals with ulterior motives aimed at undermining the state's stability.

The commissioner urged Imo indigenes, tourists, business leaders, and holiday-makers to embrace the festive season in Imo State without apprehension.

He emphasized Governor Hope Uzodimma's concerted efforts to restore peace and security within the region.

Rev Egemba highlighted collaborative efforts between his team and security agencies to ensure the safety of tourists and oversee activities across various parts of the state.

Specifically, he noted Commissioner of Police Aboki Danjuma's comprehensive tours across Owerri, Orlu, and Okigwe zones, aimed at bolstering confidence and ensuring maximum security.

Citing recent successful events such as the Assemblies of God Church's open-air crusade and a medical-religious program in Umunachi Obowo, the commissioner underscored the absence of security issues during these gatherings.

Rev Egemba emphasized that these peaceful occurrences in urban and rural areas demonstrate Imo's readiness to host visitors during the festive season.

He extended a reassuring message to those in the diaspora and potential tourists, encouraging them to participate in the Christmas and New Year celebrations without any apprehension about security concerns.

Abia market reopens days after stringent action by NAFDAC

The Eziukwu Road Market in Aba has been reopened by the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) after reaching an agreement with the market's leadership. NAFDAC officials from the Enugu regional headquarters took action on Monday by sealing the market and preventing access to shop owners and visitors.

This was done in response to suspicions of widespread product adulteration and the use of shops within the market for the production of fake goods. The Eziukwu/Ce-

mentry Road market recently underwent a three-day raid conducted by officials from the agency. T

he primary objective of this operation was to eradicate the presence of suspected counterfeit goods manufacturers within the market. Also, the agency aimed to establish a mutual understanding with the market's leadership to effectively monitor and control illicit activities related to the production of fake products.

As a result of the raid, business operations within the market were significantly disrupted, leading to the closure

of approximately 300 shops and business premises.

Furthermore, the NAFDAC officials successfully apprehended 15 individuals involved in the manufacturing of counterfeit items. A spokesperson for the traders' association, Chukwuma Alutu, disclosed in a statement made available to journalists that one of the key provisions in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was an agreement allowing NAFDAC operatives to conduct future raids without prior notification to both the market's leadership and its users.

News

Kanu: Ugochinyere expresses disappointment in S/Court, urges Tinubu to intervene for peace, unity

The spokesperson, Coalition of Opposition Lawmakers, Hon. Ikenga Imo Ugochinyere has described as sad, watching the Supreme Court deny Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), justice after declaring his Kenya abduction and home invasion illegal in the same judgement. Ugochinyere, the member representing Ideato North South Federal Constituency of Imo State in the House of Representatives, stated this following the Supreme Court judge-

ment of Friday concerning Kanu.

The Supreme Court set aside a judgment by the lower court that dismissed the terrorism charges against Kanu.

The apex court held that the Court of Appeal was wrong and that the trial court couldn't try him because the prosecution violated his rights.

In the judgment, prepared by Justice Garba Mohammed, the Supreme Court condemned the invasion of Kanu's residence, declaring it irresponsible.

The court held that there is no law in the country stopping a trial based on the violation of the rights of a suspect, adding that Kanu can file a civil matter against such act instead of removing the powers of courts to continue with his trial for alleged criminal charges.

Ugochinyere in a statement made available to journalists in Abuja lamented that Kanu will be filing fresh bail application at the Federal High Court since the apex court has ordered for the matter to be sent back there.

"It was indeed sad and painful watching the Supreme Court on Friday denying Nnamdi Kanu freedom, even after it declared his Kenya Abduction and House Invasion illegal in the same judgement.

"Hence declaring such treatments against him illegal, one expects that the apex court could have served him justice by allowing the judgment of the Court of Appeal and upholding his discharge and acquittal.

"Again one was also expecting that the accepts the prayers of his counsel, Mike Ozekhome (SAN) that the court dismiss the appeal filed by the federal government with punitive costs and uphold the cross-appeal in order to do substan-

tial justice to this matter as his client (Kanu) has been in custody since June 29, 2021," he said.

The lawyer cum lawmaker, also called on President Bola Tinubu to use his constitutional powers to intervene so as to discontinue the case in the interest of peace, reconciliation and unity, especially as it affects South-East zone, as doing so would equally help in the security architecture of the zone.

"Nigeria presently is contending with terrorism in the north-east; farmers-herders clashes and banditry in the north-central; abductions and armed attacks in the south-west; restiveness and attacks by unknown gunmen in the south-east, and

abductions, cult wars, vandalisation of oil installations and oil theft in the south-south region.

"Kanu can help tackle insecurity in the South-East, that's why those who want the confusion in the region and Imo state in particular to continue will always at nothing to make sure he doesn't get justice and be freed.

"I, therefore appeal to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to show fatherly introspection by intervening for discontinuation of the process using his constitutional powers in the interest of peace, reconciliation and unity especially in this season of Christmas and New Year where forgiveness is the in thing."



(Middle) State Programme coordinator Mr. E. N. Agwuncha, members of International Fund for Agricultural Development FGN/ANSG/IFAD Programme with some representatives of Financial Institutions during the workshop held at Awka.

Ebonyi council boss, Nwali, councillors clash over alleged unpaid salaries, cultism

The council chairman of Ezza South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Mrs Uphemia Nwali, and six councillors from the eleven wards of the council clashed following alleged unpaid wages and other remunerations to councillors. The squabble began when about seven councillors passed a vote of confidence on the female council chairman, Mrs. Nwali, during her 2024 budget presentation at the council headquarters in Onueke.

It was gathered that six out of the eleven councillors opposed and protested the vote of confidence on the female council chairman, Nwali.

Investigation revealed that the clashes resulted in a serious security breach at the council headquarters in Onueke, vandalization of many vehicles, stabbing of some persons with machetes, and destruction of other valuable properties worth millions of naira.

One of the councillors, Mr Ukpabi Henry representing Amagu/Nsokkara ward, who spoke to newsmen in Abakaliki shortly after the clash, said: "The council chairman is not doing what she is supposed to be doing

at the council. The councillors don't know what is going on in the council. The councillors don't have any entitlement in the council.

"She did not pay us our legislative votes for nine months now. The council headquarters is overgrown with weeds. Cultism and robbery are back in the council. The council has been enjoying relative peace, but it's no more now," he stated.

He, however, called on the state governor, Francis Nwifuru, to call the council chairman, Nwali, to order and mandate her to pay them their entitlements to avert dispute.

In a swift reaction, Chairman Mrs. Uphemia Nwali denied owing any entitlement or salaries to any councillors or staff of the council. She accused Ukpabi of being sponsored by the Senator representing Ebonyi Central senatorial zone, Sen. Kenneth Eze, to destabilize her administration in the council.

Nwali said: "I was presenting the 2024 budget, and everything was peaceful. The councillors passed a vote of confidence on my administration because of the peace and infrastructural facilities

we have provided for the people in the council, but Ukpabi opposed it and rushed to take the mess, but other councillors overpowered him and collected it back from him."

"He started making noise and causing trouble inside the hall. He went outside and collected a machete from his car and started snatching cars that belong to councillors and other properties that belong to the council," she said.

Ebonyi: Senator Nwebonyi trains, empowers 235 Constituents

By David Eze, Abakaliki

The Senator representing Ebonyi North Senatorial district, Senator Onyekachi Nwebonyi has empowered 235 constituents in his senatorial district.

The beneficiaries drawn from the four council areas that make up Ebonyi North senatorial zone- Abakaliki, Ebonyi, Izzi and Ohaukwu were taken on a two day training program held at the Remeritona grand hotel, Abakaliki.

The training and empowerment program facilitated by Senator Nwebonyi was anchored by the National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike.

The 335 beneficiaries were trained on fish farming and poultry productions.

The beneficiaries were separately trained by Engineer Tony Ukawuba, Dr El-

isha Dauda and Dr. Uloma Azuine (Dr Fish).

Speaking at the closing of the event, Senator Nwebonyi, who is also the deputy Senate chief whip of the 10th Assembly said the empowerment programme was aimed at alleviating poverty and creating job opportunities.

He said the distribution was done in batches as part of events outlined to benefit his constituents while disclosing that his program would continue until January 2024.

"Within five months I have been able to attract this empowerment of grinding machines with some money for them to start up a business.

"This is just the beginning, by the 7th of January I will be empowering more than 200 constituents with motorcycles, vehicles, and cash because things are hard and leaders must make

things easy for the people". Nwebonyi said.

He maintained that the essence is to assist the less privileged persons and create jobs to engage the Youths positively and drastically reduce the acts of violence and criminal activities in society.

"When the youths are engaged they won't have the time to go into crime, that is what I'm doing, I have distributed over a thousand motorcycles and there would be scholarships and buildings for the poor, we have commissioned over 10 buildings for the less privileged persons". Nwebonyi disclosed.

The highpoint of the program was the disbursement of empowerment funds to all one hundred and thirty five beneficiaries and the official presentation of new multipurpose industrial grinding machines to all the participants.

Anambra Commissioner for Youths, Hon Mba advocates for Public-Private collaboration for Innoson

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

Anambra State Commissioner for Youth Development, Mr. Patrick Agha Mba, has emphasized the significance of Public Private Community Partnership (PPCP) in advancing infrastructure and human capital development in the region.

His remarks came during the recent graduation and certification ceremony of the 2022/2023 class at the Innoson Kiara Academy, held at the manufacturing hub in Nnewi.

Hon. Agha Mba lauded the Anambra State government's commitment to human capital development under the leadership of the Youth Friendly Governor Prof. Charles Chukwuma Soludo CFR.

He highlighted the government's initiatives, including the '1 Youth 2 Skills Solution,' which trained over 5000 youths in diverse skills and provided N2 Billion for startups, citing it as evidence of the administration's dedication to empowering the youth.

He stressed the necessity for collaborative efforts between the government, individuals,

and corporations, stating that sustainable development requires a collective approach.

The Commissioner emphasized the pivotal role of human capital development in societal progress, praising Innoson Kiara Academy for fostering talent and nurturing the potential of young people across the nation.

While reiterating the Anambra State government's unwavering support for the Innoson brand, highlighting the state Governor's endorsement and utilization of Innoson Vehicles as the official state car. He also took the opportunity to discuss the state

government's '1 Youth 2 Skills Initiative' with Chief Innocent Chukwuma, Chairman of Innoson Group, showcasing it as a pivotal program aimed at wealth creation and combating youth unemployment.

Earlier in the ceremony, Mr. Endi Ezeagwa, Director of Innoson Kiara Academy, praised the State Ministry of Youth Development for their strides in practical youth empowerment. He emphasized the academy's commitment to nurturing young talent in automobile manufacturing, maintenance, and development, citing numerous successful graduates.

Editorial

Off-Cycle Polls: Prosecuting Electoral Offenders most needful

Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has filed a lawsuit against the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) “over the failure to arrest and prosecute suspected perpetrators of grave electoral offences in the recently concluded off-cycle governorship elections in Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa states.”

In the suit number FHC/ABJ/CS/1694/2023 filed last Friday at the Federal High Court in Abuja, SERAP is seeking: “an order of mandamus to direct and compel INEC to probe the allegations of electoral offences including electoral violence, in the off-cycle governorship elections in Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa states.”

SERAP is seeking: “an order of mandamus to compel INEC to promptly and effectively prosecute suspected perpetrators of these grave electoral offences, and bring to justice anyone who sponsored, aided and abetted them.”

SERAP is also seeking: “an order of mandamus to compel INEC to disclose spending details on the off-cycle governorship elections in Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa States, including the specific amount spent to conduct voter and civic education and details of the activities carried out in the three states.”

In the suit, SERAP is arguing that: “There is a legitimate public interest in ensuring accountability for the grave electoral offences in Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa states. Granting the reliefs sought would compel INEC to live up to its constitutional and statutory responsibilities and end the impunity of electoral offenders.”

SERAP is also arguing that, “The recurring cases of electoral bribery and violence make a mockery of Nigeria's electoral process and participatory democracy. The electoral offences in Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo states show that INEC has learnt little or nothing from the well-documented problems during the 2023 general elections.” According to SERAP, “Unless INEC is compelled to arrest and prosecute suspected electoral offenders and their sponsors in the elections Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa states, perpetrators would continue to enjoy impunity for their crimes.”

SERAP is arguing that, “Many years of allegations of electoral offences and the impunity of perpetrators and their sponsors have continued to undermine public trust and confidence in the electoral process and citizens' right to participation.” SERAP is also arguing that, “Electoral integrity is critical to a legitimate democracy. When the integrity of that process is compromised, the legitimacy of the government and the public confidence in public institutions is seriously undermined.”

The suit filed on behalf of SERAP by its lawyers, Kolawole Oluwadare and Andrew Nwankwo, read in part: “INEC has constitutional and statutory duties to ensure accountability for electoral offences in the country, and to guarantee the effective enjoyment of the citizens' right to vote in future elections.”

“The right to vote is fundamental and is the essence of a democratic society, and any restrictions on that right strike at the heart of representative government. Nigerians should have the final say in the election of governmental officials.” “Persistent cases of electoral offences in the country's elections gravely violate Nigerians' right to vote, which is central to the effective participation of every citizen.” “Unless INEC is compelled to arrest and prosecute suspected electoral offenders and their sponsors, impunity for these crimes against the Nigerian people will continue. And citizens will continue to lose confidence in the electoral process.” “Nigerians have the right to know how INEC

is spending public funds in the discharge of its constitutional and statutory responsibilities. It is in the public interest to compel INEC to publish spending details on the elections in the three states.” “Electoral bribery and violence and other electoral offences undermine the ability of INEC to discharge its responsibilities under Section 153 of the Nigerian Constitution and paragraph 15(a) of the third schedule of the Constitution, and the Electoral Act.” “Allegations of electoral offences during the off-cycle governorship elections in the three states are contrary to the Nigerian Constitution, the Electoral Act and international standards.” “The Nigerian Constitution provides in Section 14(1) (c) that, 'the participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.'” “Sections 121 and 127 of the Electoral Act prohibit electoral bribery and undue influence before, during and after any election. Section 145(2) provides that, 'a prosecution under this Act shall be undertaken by legal officers of the Commission or any legal practitioner appointed by it.'”

“Under section 2(a) and (b), the commission 'shall have power to conduct voter and civic education and to promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes.’” “The crisis confronting the country's elections and lack of public trust and confidence in the electoral process can be addressed if impunity for electoral offences is combated through the arrest and prosecution of suspected perpetrators.” “According to our information, the governorship elections in Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa states witnessed cases of electoral offences including electoral violence, vote-buying, conspiracy, and undue influence.” “There are reports of specific cases of pre-completed result sheets including in five local government areas of Kogi State – Adavi, Ajaokuta, Ogori/Magongo, Okehi and Okene. “Suspected political thugs reportedly harassed journalists covering the governorship election in Omuma Community in Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State. INEC official in the Oguta Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State also alleged that some men invaded her polling unit and carted away result sheets.” “According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), there were several reports of electoral violence and vote buying across the three states. For example, there were reports of incidents in PU 1, Ward 8 and PU 11, Ward 1 in Sagbama LGA in Bayelsa West.” “In Bayelsa Central, vote trading was reported in PU 16, Ward 6 in Yenegoa LGA, PU 22, PU 30 and 31, Ward 13 in Southern Ijaw LGA with reports of voter inducements ranging from N5,000 – N22,000, and items such as wrappers and rice were also reportedly shared to buy votes.” “In Kogi, there were reports of vote buying in PUs 004, 038 and 039 in Ward A of Lokoja LGA, where party agents were allegedly sharing out money to voters upon confirmation that they voted for their party candidates.” “In Imo, the two major parties' agents reportedly engaged in vote buying, sharing between N2000 to N3000. INEC officials were reportedly bribed. Electoral violence was reported in Dekini LGA, town where a thug was reportedly shot and killed by military officials while fleeing in an attempt to snatch a ballot box.” “INEC presiding officer was also reportedly abducted in Bayelsa while on his way to the Registration Area Centre – 06 (Ossioma) in Sagbama Local Government Area.” There are reports of thugs attacking several polling units in the three states.” Though, no date has been fixed for the hearing of the suit; but we employ the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Judiciary to quickly prosecute electoral offenders especially those allegedly involved in the recently concluded off-cycle elections in Kogi, Imo, Bayelsa, at least as a deterrent to intending others.

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Opinion

Saving ECOWAS by applying the breaks in Niger Republic

By Owei Lakemfa

Yahaya Hashim, a quiet, reflective and highly analytical intellectual is a man I have learnt to listen to for over four decades. So I was not surprised when after all the drama over the July, 2023 coup in Niger Republic, including threats of invasion, sanctions, border closures, electricity cut-off, and a world that seemed to have moved on, he returned to the Niger issue. I knew I had to listen to him.

His position is that a military intervention in Niger will lead to crisis in that country which will inevitably spill over into Nigeria particularly its poor regions in the North.

Secondly, he argued that there will be an influx of poor people from Niger most of whom will not find jobs in Nigeria and might therefore be open to recruitment into the ranks of bandits and insurgents. Thirdly, he argued, there is evidence of the involvement of nationals of the neighbouring countries in terrorism, banditry and farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. So the situation may get worse.

Hashim posited that Nigeria's borders with Niger cannot be easily policed. So, the influx of both refugees and criminal elements cannot be contained if there is crisis in Niger. He reflected that when there was crises in Tchad, Nigerian highways became unsafe especially in the North and the military had to be deployed to the Lake Chad area and to our roads.

He warned that our democracy like most democracies today is fragile with key participants in the election still trying to delegitimize its outcome. He also pointed out that Nigeria's security forces are already overstretched given the increased number of theatres of insecurity in the country. Hashim counselled that it is not in our best interest to deepen the crisis in Niger, and: "Besides it is not our business to 'spread democracy' let alone by force.

He said: "Democracy cannot be introduced from abroad or from another country and not by Military force." He asked us to learn from the many failures of the United States, US in this regard.

The analyst said: "In our copycat mentality and our delusion of grandeur as 'Giant of Africa', we tend to adopt the tools of Global hegemony." Sanctions on a country, he said, is a collective punishment of its people and therefore an immoral tool of hegemony. The intellectual posited that: "ECOWAS is not a sovereign; it is a club. Countries, on the other hand, are sovereign." In a Fanonian style, he warned Africans not to become neo-colonial tools in the hands of France: "The liberation of 'Francophone' African countries from the clutches of France was not completed. France controls the national reserves of 14 African countries. It imposed what it called colonial debt. A



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Tinubu

debt owed for colonizing ('civilizing') African countries. France has tied the currency of the so called 'francophone' countries to the French currency and to Euros subsequently. This has frustrated the ambition of ECOWAS to have a common currency for West Africa. All over Africa there is now an awareness of the dishonourable role of France in Africa." Some European countries he said, claim they have troops in Niger to protect it against terrorists: "If that were true, they would have threatened to withdraw their troops as a bargaining card for restoration of President Bazoum, instead their threat is to withdraw humanitarian aid and invade the very country they are supposed to be helping." Nigeria he said used to be concerned about military bases in Africa saying such bases in neighbouring countries is a red flag. He blamed the US and Europe for the destruction of Libya, the murder of President Ghaddafi and the subsequent spread of Al Qaeda and ISIS in the Sahel. Some, he said, have argued the West uses the insurgents as a check on the leaders of these countries. He concluded that if AU and ECOWAS want to use military force, it should be against the armed insurgents, not against the military of a sister country. However, it was not only Yahaya Hashim that was continually thinking about some solution for Niger, the European Union, EU has also been at it except for different reasons. The Niger issue was on the front burner at the September 2023 plenary meeting of the European Parliament which sought ways of containing Niger. In its September 29, 2023 briefing, the EU insisted that the coup must be reversed because it threatens the "security architecture that the European Union (EU), France, other EU Member States, such as Germany and Italy, and the United States sought to build in the Sahel to fight terrorism." The following month, the EU initiated measures to impose sanctions on the military rulers in Niger. While ECOWAS and the AU seemed to be snoring over all these,

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger on December 1, 2023 decided to create a confederation 'The Alliance of Sahel States' aimed at integrating their economic and defence structures. The confederation they said, offers "great potential for peace, stability, diplomatic strength and economic development that a strengthened political alliance offers". Two days later, Niger tore up two key military agreements it had with the EU; the Military Partnership Mission and the EU Civilian Capacity-Building Mission established in 2012. The confederation in a way marked a parallel structure to the ECOWAS and has the potential of widening as it could potentially bring in Guinea. This in a region that is increasingly facing insecurity including an alleged coup attempt in Sierra Leone and a military strike in Guinea Bissau. Besides, there is the undemocratic regime in Cote d'Ivoire where President Alassane Ouattara is ruling for an unconstitutional third term, the creeping violence in Senegal where President Sall has been firmly denied an unconstitutional third term but is

threatening the February 25, 2024 general elections by trying to stop the opposition leader. Given the challenges of the region, the ECOWAS Parliament demanded that the Heads of State and Government should lift the sanctions imposed since July on the Niger Republic. Nigeria's Senator Ali Ndume said the parliament took the decision because: "Children and women have been exposed to untold hardship. No meaningful progress has been made in resolving this issue." Finally, at the 64th Ordinary Session of ECOWAS, this Sunday, the Heads of State decided to dialogue with the Military regime in Niger primarily on the need for a short transition roadmap. It was a little disguised consensus to walk back from sanctions and a military invasion of Niger Republic. This may not be the news the West was hoping to hear, but it is in the best interest of Africa. Beyond this, we have an ECOWAS to repair and rebuild, and an Africa in urgent need of reconstruction and development if we are to stop being the foot mat of the world.

(Hashim posited that Nigeria's borders with Niger cannot be easily policed. So, the influx of both refugees and criminal elements cannot be contained if there is crisis in Niger. He reflected that when there was crises in Tchad, Nigerian highways became unsafe especially in the North and the military had to be deployed to the Lake Chad area and to our roads.)

News

Tinubu, Govs, Ohanaeze, others mourn Ezeife

President Bola Tinubu, Southeast states' governors, Igbo apex socio-cultural group, Ohanaeze Ndigbo among other eminent groups and individuals across the country have mourned the passage of former Anambra State governor, Chief Chukwuemeka Ezeife, who died in Abuja on Thursday, at the age of 85 years.

The family of the first civilian governor of Anambra State announced his death in a statement issued by the deceased's younger brother, Chief Rob Ezeife in the early hours of yesterday.

The statement reads: "On behalf of the Ezeife Dynasty of Igbo-Ukwu, I wish to announce the promotion to glory of our most distinguished son, Okwadike, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, CON, a former Federal Permanent Secretary, the first Executive Governor of Anambra State, a former Political Adviser to the President and former Presidential Aspirant."

"This sad event took place yesterday at 6pm at the Federal Medical Centre, Abuja. More details about the deceased and the arrangements for his State Burial will be announced later."

The former Governor was born at Igbo-Ukwu, Anambra State on 20 November 1939.

The announcement was received with a deep shock by President Bola Tinubu.

In a statement issued by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Ajuri Ngelale, President Tinubu extended his sympathies to the family of the deceased, the Anambra State government and the people of the state.

While extolling the late elder statesman, especially for his towering influence in the nation's political landscape, he recalled his many contributions to governance in Nigeria.

The statement reads: "President Bola Tinubu sympathizes with the Ezeife family, the people, and the government of Anambra State on the passing of Chief Chukwuemeka Ezeife, CON, former governor of the state.

"Chief Ezeife, Okwadike of Igbo-Ukwu, was governor of Anambra from 1992 to 1993.

"President Tinubu extols the towering influence of the former federal permanent secretary in Nigeria's political landscape as well as his leadership credentials, describing his passing as a painful loss.

"The President recalls the contributions the late Chief Ezeife made in the shaping of public discourse and governance in Nigeria, as well as in laying the foundation for the advancement of his dear state.

"While praying for the repose of the soul of the dearly departed, the President encourages his loved ones to take solace in his indelible legacy."

Also mourning the deceased, Anambra State governor, Prof Chukwuna Soludo, described Ezeife as a man of many hats.

In a statement released by his Press Secretary, Chris Aburime, yesterday in Awka, Soludo described Ezeife as a scholar, a visionary and a man of deep compassion.

Soludo said: "It is with profound sadness and a deep sense of loss that Anambra

State Governor, Prof Chukwuna Charles Soludo, CFR, mourns the passing of a distinguished son of Anambra State, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, CON, who transitioned peacefully on Thursday, December 14, 2023, at the age of 85 years at the Federal Medical Centre, Abuja.

"A most illustrious son of the Ezeife Dynasty of Igbo-Ukwu area of Anambra State, Dr. Ezeife, a man of many hats, was a titan in the annals of our state and nation.

"Fondly called 'Okwadike', he was elected governor of Anambra State on the platform of the Social Democratic Party between January 1992 and November 1993 during the aborted Third Republic.

"As a Harvard-trained economist, Dr. Ezeife once served with resolute dedication and integrity as a Federal Permanent Secretary, leaving behind a legacy of excellence in public service.

"As the first civilian Governor of Anambra State, he navigated the complexities of post-military rule with wisdom and foresight, laying the foundation for the vibrant state we know today.

"He once served as a Political Adviser to the former President Olusegun Obasanjo, just as he was also a Presidential Aspirant. Dr Ezeife was always driven by a deep desire to improve the lives of his fellow Nigerians.

"He was a bridge-builder, a voice of reason, and a tireless advocate for the unity and progress of Anambra State and Nigeria as a whole.

"His departure leaves a void that will be difficult to

fill.

"However, we find solace in the knowledge that his legacy of service, integrity, and unwavering commitment to the common good will continue to inspire us all.

"On behalf of the government and good people of Anambra State, Governor Soludo extends his deepest condolences to Dr. Ezeife's family and loved ones."

Soludo's Imo State counterpart, Governor Hope Uzodimma, said Ezeife will be sorely missed by all who came in contact with him, adding that in his passing, the country has lost an asset.

Uzodimma said the late Ezeife's commitment to the good of all – both the common man as well as the high and mighty marked him out as a man who came to serve God and humanity.

He said that Dr. Ezeife's

legacies as former governor, former Permanent Secretary and former Political Adviser will remain indelible in the minds of people, describing his death as painful and regrettable.

The Governor noted that "Ezeife's vocal voice and contributions on issues that border on good governance in his state, Nigeria, and the society at large cannot be forgotten in a hurry."

He therefore prayed God Almighty to grant Dr. Ezeife's soul a peaceful repose and to his family, the grace to bear the loss.

Ohanaeze mourns too

Apex Igbo sociocultural group, Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide has described the late Ezeife as a consistent purveyor of morals, justice and equity.

Ohanaeze, which said it received with deep shock the

death of yet another Igbo titan, further described Ezeife as a one man riot squad, an erudite scholar and astute bureaucrat, brave and thoughtful dogged fighter and an accomplished politician.

Ohanaeze's reaction was contained in a statement issued by its national publicity secretary, Dr. Alex Ogbornia, in Enugu yesterday.

The statement read: "Okwadike was a consistent purveyor of morals, justice and equity. He was a remarkable advocate of progressivism in its purest tradition. When the Moshood Abiola mandate was truncated, Ezeife risked the military dungeon in the pursuit of justice. A detribalised patriot who warned that unless there is a re-federalisation of Nigeria and fundamental restructuring of the polity, Nigeria will continue to grope in the dark.

"Ezeife was an unwavering and steadfast personality. He was on the side of the masses, the vulnerable and the downtrodden.



Governor Charles Soludo, joins his Chief of Staff, Mr. Ernest Ezeajughi, family, friends, and colleagues to celebrate the later on his birthday anniversary, Friday, December 15, 2023

Be security conscious, vigilante as you travel for Christmas, IPOB tells Ndigbo

...identifies roads and places to avoid during yuletide

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has called on all Ndigbo travelling to Southeast to be weary of dangers or security breach in during the yuletide season. The group also identified some roads, junctions, places to avoid during these periods.

Media and Publicity Secretary to IPOB, Comrade Emma Powerful disclosed this to News Echo in a press statement made available on Sunday, 17th Dec, 2023.

According to the statement "The global family and movement of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) raises alarm over the influx of Nigeria policemen without uniform. Most of them are likely criminals. Moreso, our people should be careful of the agent provocateurs who are kidnapping people for ransom and killing some of their victims around some routes in Anambra and Imo States. Ndigbo are advised to be security conscious and vigilant as they travel to celebrate

Christmas".

"Biafrans should not be intimidated by sponsored criminals from not returning home for Christmas. However, we advise our people to take the following travel advice seriously and be on their guard. People should inform their families and friends when they are traveling and what routes they may be taking".

"The following roads within Anambra and Imo States should be avoided if possible. But where not possible, extra caution should be taken as you travel for this Christmas season.

1. Nnewi, Ukpok, Isseke road, 2. Orsumoghu to Mbosi road, 3. Azia junction road to Orsumoghu junction, 4. Isseke to Ubuluihejiofo road, 5. Isseke to Orsumoghu road, 6. Orsumoghu to Orsuihiteukwa, Ihitenansa link road to Eke ututu.

"Anybody coming to Nnewi South, Ihiala - Igboekwu - Orlu road should be very careful if possible avoid the road completely".

"Also, be very careful at the TOTAL filling station at Ihiala junction.

Travelers must avoid the use of shortcuts along Lagos - Benin expressway, Onisha-Owerri road, and any other shortcut routes".

"People must be patient to stay along the main road even when there are traffic jams. Any shortcut or narrow pathways can lead passengers to the hands of criminal elements".

"Don't ignore this warning and information as you travel to Alaigbo during this Christmas season".

"Share this press release widely. Please be careful not to trust any security personnel you encounter in the Eastern region. Many of them are colluding with criminal gangs".

"However, ESN Operatives will be on the spot patrol at this yuletide season to secure our land. Therefore, criminal elements and their collaborators should watch their backs. Neither Nigeria compromised security forces nor their sponsored criminals will stop Ndigbo from returning home to celebrate Christmas as usual", the statement concludes.

Anambra farmers optimistic as FGN/IFAD-VCDP partners banks for credit facilities

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

Farmers in Anambra have breathed a sigh of relief on some challenges faced in running their financial activities.

This came as the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Anambra State Government in collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development FGN/ANSG/IFAD Programme of Value Chain Development Programme VCDP partnered with Financial Institutions to address Farmers' need for credit facilities.

This initiative was disclosed by the State Programme coordinator Mr. E. N. Agwuncha during the just concluded 2-day meeting workshop held in Awka. Mr. Agwuncha explained that the meeting was geared at strengthening the partnership between the Programme and Financial Institutions to develop finan-

cial products or adjust existing ones to address farmers' needs as the Programme draws closer to its end.

He pointed out that under this initiative, a survey was conducted to understand the needs of farmers as well as the products available with the financial institutions for farmers to access while ensuring there is no conflict of interest.

Earlier, the VCDP Rural Finance Officer (RFO) Mr. Chukwujekwu Obianefo in an interview said that this would be a pilot stage financial inclusion initiative of the Programme for next year, adding that partnership with the financial institutions would consolidate the objective of the Programme in the state. Mr. Obianefo also said the partnership will in turn build a solid relationship between the institutions and the farmers towards developing a fresh product or adjusting existing ones as would be dis-

cussed in their board meeting to ensure a sustainable plan for the Programme exit.

The resources person, Dr. Johnpaul Onyekanaeso in a paper presentation enjoined the financial institutions to always equip themselves with knowledge on the agricultural field and their audience, the farmers.

"Staff training" requires you/the institutions to have a good knowledge of agriculture in different crops as well as the best approach to handling farmers so as not to jeopardize the objective of the Programme."

He explained that farmers are now smart and requires smarter way and technicality in dealing with their need hence credit facilities.

Speaking to our Correspondent, Chinyere Okeke and Kamso Orji both farmers in Awka, and Isuaniocha said the challenges faced in accessing loans from banks are stressful and sometimes the interest rates is exorbitant.

News

Deputy Governor, Dr. Ibezim, Sen Ubah, Hon Orogbu mourns late Anambra ex-Governor, Ezeife

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

Few days after the death of late Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife (Okwadike), CON, who was a former Federal Permanent Secretary, the first Executive Governor of Anambra State, a former Political Adviser to the President and former Presidential Aspirant has continued to receive encomium

The Deputy Governor of Anambra State, Dr. Onyekachukwu Ibezim described the death of former Governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife CON as a great loss to his family, the good people of Anambra and Nigeria at large.

Dr. Onyekachi Ibezim said, Dr. Chukwuemeka

Ezeife's demise has opened a deep sore in the hearts of the people of Anambra State and Nigerians that looked up to him as a rallying point and a political stabilizer.

Mr. Deputy also sympathized with Okwadike's family and urged them to take heart, noting that the former governor's service to the people of Anambra and Nigeria as a whole will remain his enduring legacy.

Also, Prof. Oby Lilian Orogbu, the representative of the Awka North and South Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, has expressed her condolences on the passing of Late Chief Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife.

In her message, Prof. Orogbu praised the late elder statesman's fine qualities and

acknowledged his positive impact on Anambra State, the South East, and the nation.

Describing him as a seasoned administrator and refined politician, Prof. Orogbu highlighted his significant contributions to national development, unity, and his role as the first Executive Governor of Anambra State. She lamented that his demise would create a considerable void for the Igbo community.

Offering prayers for the eternal repose of the departed, Prof. Oby Lilian Orogbu recognized Late Chief Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife's indelible legacies and the impact he had on the region and the nation.

Anambra South Senatorial District in his speech

said "On behalf of my family and the good people of Anambra South Senatorial District, I wish to condole with the Ezeife family of Igbo, Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State over the death of their father, grandfather and great grandfather, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife (Okwadike Ig-

boukwu). I am deeply saddened with the news of his death, but we shall remain grateful to God for his sufficient grace upon him in his lifetime.

Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife was a highly respected figure in the South-East geopolitical zone and Nigeria in general, and his loss will be felt

by all who knew him.

He was not only a respected leader who served our nation in various capacities but also a statesman who left behind a legacy that will be cherished for generations to come.

His contributions to our dear state, particularly in the areas of leadership, governance, and community development during and after his tenure as the first executive governor, were invaluable and his dedication to the progress and well-being of our people will always be remembered.

Anambra Public servants receive 20,000 Xmas bonus as Soludo pledges continued support

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

Anambra State Governor, Professor Chukwuma Charles Soludo CFR, has assured civil servants in the state of his administration's continued support and commitment to their welfare.

The Governor who stated this at the 2023 Public Service Day celebration held at the Jerome Udoji Secretariat, Awka, promised cash award of twenty thousand naira for the state workforce, in addition to their leave allowance which had been paid.

The event had the theme; "Digitalization of work processes in the public service: A Gateway to efficient resources utilization and National development".

The Governor who spoke shortly after observing a minute of silence for the former Governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, who recently passed on, congratulated and thanked all civil servants in the state for their dedicated service to the people of Anambra.

Governor Soludo emphasized the importance of digitalization in the public service, stating that it is the way to go for efficient resource utilization and national development.

He highlighted the state's recent digital training programme for 20,000 youths, which benefited many civil servants and assured that the government will continue to invest in digital tools and training to enhance the productivity of the workforce.

In a bid to further equip the workforce for the digital age, Governor Soludo announced that 1,000 laptops will be dis-

tributed to civil servants in the coming year and stressed the need for public servants to be tech-savvy in today's world.

Governor Soludo acknowledged the current economic challenges facing the country, including double-digit inflation and exchange rate depreciation and noted that public servants, with their fixed incomes, are often the hardest hit by these challenges.

He however, assured of his government's commitment to support the workers. He pointed to the payment of outstanding gratuities accumulated by the previous administration and the consistent payment of salaries as examples of the government's commitment.

In a gesture of appreciation, Governor Soludo donated buses to public servants to ease their transportation and encouraged them to participate in the distribution of palm and coconut seedlings, stating that planting 10-15 seedlings could help them escape poverty in the coming years.

Earlier, the Head of Service, Barr. Theodora Igwegbe while thanking the Governor

for the 10% increment in workers' salaries and N12,000 monthly payment from September to December palliative, commended him for approving that civil servants acquire digital skills training and made a case for other needs.

Secretary to the State Government, Prof. Solo Chukwulobelu, Chief of Staff to the Governor, Mr. Ernest Ezeajughu, members of the state executive council, National President of Anambra State Association of Town Union, Barr. Titus Akpudo, Permanent Secretaries among others attended the event.

On her part, while speaking about the digitalization of work processes in the public service, the Chairman of the Occasion and former Head of Service, Barr. Mrs. Ngozi Melifonwu encouraged civil servants not to become weary in diligently discharging their duties.

She advised them to take advantage of the digital skills Soludo's administration is offering free of charge so as to be efficient and productive in this digital age.



Some participants of Sen. Nwibonyi empowerment programme in Abakaliki.

Anambra Commissioner for Youths, Hon Mba advocates Public-Private collaboration at Innoson

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

Anambra State Commissioner for Youth Development, Mr. Patrick Agha Mba, has emphasized the significance of Public Private Community Partnership (PPCP) in advancing infrastructure and human capital development in the region.

His remarks came during the recent graduation and certification ceremony of the 2022/2023 class at the Innoson Kiara Academy, held at the manufacturing hub in Nnewi.

Hon. Agha Mba lauded the Anambra State government's commitment to human capital development under the leadership of the Youth Friendly Governor Prof. Charles Chukwuma Soludo CFR.

He highlighted the gov-

ernment's initiatives, including the '1 Youth 2 Skills Solution,' which trained over 5000 youths in diverse skills and provided N2 Billion for startups, citing it as evidence of the administration's dedication to empowering the youth.

He stressed the necessity for collaborative efforts between the government, individuals, and corporations, stating that sustainable development requires a collective approach.

The Commissioner emphasized the pivotal role of human capital development in societal progress, praising Innoson Kiara Academy for fostering talent and nurturing the potential of young people across the nation.

While reiterating the Anambra State government's unwavering support for the Innoson brand, highlighting the state Governor's en-

dorsement and utilization of Innoson Vehicles as the official state car.

He also took the opportunity to discuss the state government's '1 Youth 2 Skills Initiative' with Chief Innocent Chukwuma, Chairman of Innoson Group, showcasing it as a pivotal program aimed at wealth creation and combating youth unemployment.

Earlier in the ceremony, Mr. Endi Ezeagwa, Director of Innoson Kiara Academy, praised the State Ministry of Youth Development for their strides in practical youth empowerment.

He emphasized the academy's commitment to nurturing young talent in automobile manufacturing, maintenance, and development, citing numerous successful graduates.

Ebonyi council Boss, Nwali denies owing salaries, allowances

By David Eze, Abakaliki

The Executive Chairman of Ezza South local government Hon Mrs. Euphemia Nwali has denied that her administration is owing councillors salaries and allowances

Mrs. Nwali was reacting to a report that the council was owing the councillors for nine months allowance.

The council boss who described the accusation as a

lie and plot to disparage her good records in office noted that her administration from its inception had never owned or withheld allowances and salaries of councillors or staff. She explained that salaries of workers including councillors and their entitlements are paid promptly.

Recall that Hon Ukpabi and Oviga Cletus Oviga of Amezekwe ward had accused the chairman of withholding their entitlements for

nine months and misappropriation of council fund.

Trouble started when about seven councillors passed a vote of confidence on the council chairman, Mrs. Nwali, during her 2024 budget presentation at the council headquarters in Onueke.

It was gathered that some councillors opposed and protested the vote of confidence on the chairman, Nwali which resulted serious security breach at the council

headquarters in Onueke, vandalism of many vehicles, stabbing of some persons with machetes.

One of the councillors, Mr Ukpabi Henry representing Amagu/Nsokkara ward, who addressed newsmen in Abakaliki shortly after the clash, said: "The council chairman is not doing what she is supposed to be doing at the council. The councillors don't know what is going on in the council. The councillors

don't have any entitlement in the council.

"She did not pay us our legislative votes for nine months now. The council headquarters is overgrown with weeds. Cultism and robbery are back in the council. The council has been enjoying relative peace, but it's no more now," he stated.

He, however, called on the state governor, Francis Nwifuru, to call the council chairman, Nwali, to order and mandate her to pay them their entitlements.

News

Ndi-Igbo strongly behind Tinubu - Ohanaeze President, Iwuanyanwu

President General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide, Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, has said the entire Igbo nation has resolved to support the President Bola Tinubu-led government.

Speaking during a courtesy visit to the Oba of Lagos, Rilwan Akiolu, in his palace yesterday, Chief Iwuanyanwu, while appealing to the monarch for a renewed relationship between the Igbo and Yoruba in Lagos, said, "During the election, we, Igbo didn't vote for Bola because we were told it was our turn.

"Bola was very good to us when he was governor. He treated Ndigbo very well. During the time of the governorship, Igbo in Lagos

came to me, and I told them to support Governor Sanwo Olu.

"But the President of Nigeria today is Bola Tinubu. Ohanaeze has pledged our loyalty to support our brother because he was gladly nominated by his party, the All Progressive Congress (APC). He went for the election and was declared the winner. People went to the tribunal, and the tribunal said Tinubu won. They went to the Supreme Court, and the apex court said he won.

"I can tell you now, as the president of Ohanaeze Ndigbo that Igbo have resolved that we are going to give total support to President Tinubu. Let him believe us; I am the leader of Ndigbo.

"What we want from Tinubu is justice, fairness, and equity. We don't want to take another person's state; whatever is our right should be given to us. We are going to support him, we are going to be loyal to him, and anybody who fights him unjustly, we are going to join him to fight such a person, but all we want is for him to give us our rights."

The Ohanaeze leader, however, reiterated that there was no rift between the Yoruba and Igbo.

"There's no rift. Igbo and Yoruba have no problem at all. Our parents in Igboland always tell us that wherever we go, we should obey the laws of people. I'm also advising the younger generation to cultivate the habit

of obeying the laws of the land, as it is too late to talk about separation between Ndigbo and Yoruba. We are now inseparable."

Responding, Oba Akiolu urged Igbo in Lagos to play by the rules.

He said, "We know Igbos are very hard workers, but you have to respect the owners of the land. We have identified the problem in Nigeria, and what we want is a solution.

"I am appealing to you in the name of God. The governor cannot deliberately

destroy your property. Just play according to the rules of the game.

"To the Igbo, anybody who wishes the best for Lagos is a Lagosian.

I assure Ndigbo that nobody will maliciously mistreat you. All of you should cooperate with the Lagos government to move the state forward."



Sen. Nwibonyi during the empowerment programme in Abakaliki.

Nigeria is a failing state'; restructure before 2027 - Jega tasks FG

Former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof Attahiru Jega, has described Nigeria's presidential system of government as defective.

He called on Nigerians to put their heads together and ensure the country is restructured before the 2027 general election.

Jega said power devolution to the sub-nationals was critical for the country to develop, pointing out that the Nigerian president is too powerful.

Speaking on Saturday, while delivering the convocation lecture at the Bauchi State University, Gadau, on the theme, 'Safeguarding Nigeria's Future: Prioritising Citizen's Welfare and Security Amidst Challenges', he however, expressed strong opposition to the parliamentary system of government.

Jega argued that restructuring was necessary for the emergence of the best of a federal system.

He stated, "Our leaders in leadership positions, between now and 2027, we need to put our heads together and have a rational, evidence-based process of restructuring the Nigerian federation, and to my mind, the major thing we need to do is devolve power and resources from the federal to the state and local governments.

"Even if all we do is go back to the way power was distributed in the 1963 Constitution, we should do that but I think we should even go beyond that because we

need to reduce the power of the federal government.

"There is fear that if more resources go to the states and local governments, given what we see in Nigeria now, many people are afraid that it cannot solve the problems, but my own thinking is that the more power and resources in the state and local governments the less attractive the federal government becomes. Then, more people will concentrate in terms of bringing appropriate reforms and development. It is very important we truly address these issues," Jega explained.

The former INEC boss stated that the high cost of governance must be addressed to safeguard Nigeria's future, adding that there was an urgent need to reduce power concentration at the federal level.

He accused the executive arm of government, both at the federal and state levels, of reckless spending and abuse of power, saying Nigeria was heading towards a failed state because the political class had taken power to destroy the institutions rather than build them.

"In addition to that, they have raised the cost of governance in such a way that it is a serious challenge that can put Nigeria in jeopardy," he added.

Jega emphasised the need for constitutional amendments, particularly on policy decisions to cut the cost of governance.

He added: "I am saying this because it appears there is now a movement of some elite pushing for the return of the parliamentary sys-

tem. I think it is a terrible thing to happen. You started with the parliamentary system; you moved to the presidential system, you are not doing it well, and you think the solution is to go back to the parliamentary system."

Jega explained that until the culture that caused profligacy in governance was properly addressed, going back to the parliamentary system would be disastrous and not solve the problem.

"The problem is we have a presidential system and it is a coagulated presidential system; one that is not taking the best practices of other presidential systems in the world and it is important we pay attention to this.

"I don't believe Nigeria is a failed state but we must realise that Nigeria is a failing state and if we put it in jeopardy and don't safeguard it then the worst can happen," he added.

He further suggested that political leaders must find ways of reducing overdependence on revenue from oil through increased agricultural productivity, focus on agro-allied industries and creation of opportunities for the teeming unemployed youth population.

"We should also ensure that we reform the manufacturing sector. No country develops if it cannot consume sufficiently from the home market.

"A situation in Nigeria where virtually everything is imported is a recipe for disaster and can push our country into a situation in which we cannot safeguard."

Convert N50bn students' loan to grants, ASUU tells FG

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has asked the federal government to convert the N50 billion budgeted for the students' loan scheme into grants to students.

President of ASUU, Prof. Emmanuel Osodeke, made the call during a television interview at the weekend. Osodeke lamented the burden of paying back the loan in a country where jobs are not guaranteed after graduation.

Recall that President Bola Tinubu signed the student loan bill into law on June 12. The law is to provide easy access to higher education for indigent Nigerians through interest-free loans from the Nigerian Education Loan Fund.

Tinubu in October announced that the scheme would commence in January 2024, with the federal government voting N50 billion for the programme in the 2024 budget.

But, the ASUU president said allocating the N50 Billion as grants would have more impact and serve as a humane investment in the education of Nigerian students.

He said: "If the issue is just N50 billion, why can't we convert that N50 billion as a country like Nigeria to grants for the children of the very poor?"

"Let's give to those who cannot afford it, not give them a loan that becomes a liability for them before they even graduate and are not sure of getting a job.

"We are thinking of the Nigerian people, those who

cannot afford it, those children who are in the villages whose parents earn less than N30, 000 a month," he said.

"If it is just about 50 billion, the Nigerian government should give that N50 billion as grants to the students rather than giving it as a loan that will encumber them in the future and could make them start going to crime, to pay for this loan."

According to Osodeke, such initiatives as student loans had failed twice before.

He berated the conditions attached to the loan, saying it is economically disadvantaged for students in rural areas.

Osodeke said, "In such a country where you easily have access to Jobs after

graduation cannot pay it back and they are suffering, or people committing suicide. Is it in Nigeria where the children are sure that even in 10 years, you might not get employment that they can pay back the loan?" he queried.

The ASUU president said he doubted the impact of a N50 billion loan, saying, "How many people will N50 billion go to as a loan?"

"Look at the conditionality, which level 12 officer will sign for the children of the poor in the village to get access to the loan? How much was budgeted this year? — N50 billion...how many people will N50 billion get to as a loan?" he queried.

National Security: IGP Egbetokun meets DIGs, CPs, Commanders today, Monday

To effectively secure the country this yuletide season, the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, will meet with Deputy Inspectors General of Police (DIGs), Assistant Inspectors General of Police, Commissioners of Police (CPs), and other top commanders in the Force.

The meeting which will be held at the Force Headquarters in Abuja on Monday was announced in a statement on Sunday by the Force spokesman, Ademuyiwa Adejobi. Egbetokun is expected to roll out the achievements of the police within the last 10 weeks. "The meeting, which is at the instance of the IGP, would address many security issues and review Police's anti-crime strategies for efficient

cy and effectiveness towards peace and order in our dear country," the statement read. "The IGP would also seize the opportunity to roll out the achievements of the police within the last 10 weeks.

"The meeting involves Commissioners of Police and above and other tactical commanders. All hands must be on deck to provide adequate security for all and sundry in Nigeria". Nigeria has been combating various security challenges ranging from terrorism in the North-East to banditry in the North-West and North-Central, militancy and oil theft in the Niger Delta region, calls for secession in the South-East, kidnapping for ransom as well as ritual in the South-West among several others.

News

Celebrating 2023 Christmas: Nigerians groan in lack, hardship

Another season of Christmas is here again. It is that time of the year when Christians all over the world celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the living Son of God. As people who believe in Him, we are reminded of the unfailing and never-ending love of God for us. The story of Christmas tells us of God's loving intervention in the human situation of helplessness and hopelessness.

"This year, we are celebrating Christmas in Nigeria amidst uncertainty, fear, untold suffering, hardship and pain in the face of a harsh economy, record inflation figures, worsening poverty situation and a weakened security system due to bad governance.

This precarious situation in our national life can be likened to the sufferings, helplessness and hopelessness of the Israelites as a result of the decisions of their leaders to forsake God and pursue after their bellies which they have made into gods through greed, selfishness and blatant corruption.

Expectation ahead of Christmas and New Year celebration among many appears gloomy as the festive season's draws nearer owing to the astronomical hike in food items.

Food items such as rice,

vegetable oil, frozen and live chickens, tomato paste, pepper and condiments, which are essential for Christmas and New Year parties are beyond the reach of many, as they lament.

These are stressful times, and we live in a very fearful age. The government and politicians have used governance and the lives of the poor masses as a means for self-benefit. Celebrations nowadays are often marked by a sense of oddness and bitterness. Even in the midst of hardship, hunger, and suffering, Christmas remains a time of joy, happiness, and hope. Christians pray not only for change but also for the strength and resilience to endure hardship and overcome adversity. It is hard to find Nigerians who have everything they need for Christmas. We may lack courage, patience, finances, or resources, but all around us, there is hardship and suffering. However, the spirit of Christmas still shines brightly, reminding us of love, hope, and the possibility of a better tomorrow. We should focus on these positive aspects and use them as a source of strength during these difficult times.

Recall that, Nigeria's annual inflation rate rose to 28.20 per cent in November from 27.33 per cent in the

previous month, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said Friday.

The statistics office said the November 2023 headline inflation rate showed an increase of 0.87 per cent points when compared to the October 2023 headline inflation rate.

The NBS said on a year-on-year basis, the headline inflation rate was 6.73 per cent points higher compared to the rate recorded in November 2022, which was 21.47 per cent.

"This shows that the headline inflation rate (year-on-year basis) increased in November 2023 when compared to the same month in the preceding year (i.e. November 2022)," it said.

Furthermore, the bureau said on a month-on-month basis, the headline inflation rate in November 2023 was 2.09 per cent, which was 0.35 per cent higher than the rate recorded in October 2023 (1.73 per cent).

This, it said, means that in November 2023, the rate of increase in the average price level is more than the rate of increase in the average price level in October 2023.

According to the report, the food inflation rate in November 2023 quickened to 32.84 per cent on a year-on-year basis, which was 8.72 per cent points higher com-

pared to the rate recorded in November 2022 (24.13 per cent).

In recent years, food prices have been on the rise across Nigeria. The situation deteriorated due to the impact of government policies such as the removal of subsidies on petrol, among others.

In July, Mr Tinubu declared an immediate State of Emergency on food insecurity to tackle the increase in food prices.

He also directed that "all matters pertaining to food & water availability and affordability, as essential livelihood items, be included within the purview of the National Security Council."

In its recent inflation report, the NBS said the con-

tributions of items on the divisional year-on-year level to the increase in the headline index are food & non-alcoholic beverages (14.61 per cent), housing water, electricity, gas & other fuel (4.72 per cent), clothing & footwear (2.16 per cent), and transport (1.84 per cent).

Others are furnishings & household equipment & maintenance (1.42 per cent), education (1.11 per cent), health (0.85 per cent), miscellaneous goods & services (0.47 per cent), restaurant & hotels (0.34 per cent), alcoholic beverage, tobacco & kola (0.31 per cent), recreation & culture (0.19 per cent) and communication (0.19 per cent).

The report said the percentage change in the average CPI for the twelve months ending November 2023 over the average of the CPI for the previous twelve-month period was 24.01 per cent, showing a 5.64 per cent increase compared to 18.37 per cent

recorded in November 2022.

The food inflation rate in November 2023 was 32.84 per cent on a year-on-year basis, which was 8.72 per cent points higher compared to the rate recorded in November 2022 (24.13 per cent).

The NBS said the rise in food inflation on a year-on-year basis was caused by increases in prices of bread and cereals, oil and fat, potatoes, yam and other tubers, fish, fruit, meat, vegetables and coffee, tea and cocoa.

"On a month-on-month basis, the food inflation rate in November 2023 was 2.42 per cent this was 0.51 per cent higher compared to the rate recorded in October 2023 (1.91 per cent)," it said.

It explained that the rise in food inflation on a month-on-month basis was caused by a rise in the rate of increase in the average prices of bread and cereals, oil and fat, meat, coffee, tea and cocoa, potatoes, yam and other tubers.



Cardinal Angelo Becciu.

Shettima inaugurates NCWC towards ending Acute Malnutrition nationwide

Vice President Kashim Shettima has inaugurated a high-powered Nutrition Core Working Committee (NCWC) aimed at addressing severe acute malnutrition in the country.

The special committee, dubbed the "intellectual powerhouse" by Shettima, will spearhead the fight against hunger and malnutrition nationwide.

Speaking Friday while inaugurating the Nutrition Core Working Committee at the State House, Abuja, the Vice President emphasised the importance of co-ordination and collaboration with the National Committee on Food and Nutrition (NCFN).

"We are determined to upturn the negative nutrition indices of this country," he declared.

Shettima cited his recent visit to Tudun Biri village in Kaduna State where he witnessed the tragic plight of a malnourished child caught in the unfortunate military drone strike, saying "We have no excuse for poverty."

Highlighting Nigeria's immense potential for pro-

perity, the Vice President's passion for the cause was evident, as he pledged unwavering support to the committee.

"You are our engine room," he said, urging the committee to start by tackling the malnutrition crisis from the most vulnerable communities.

"Advise us, draw the roadmap," he implored, emphasising the crucial role of the members of the committee as expert advisors.

Shettima expressed a resolute commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty and malnutrition.

"Let us do something truly impactful for Nigerians," he urged.

The Vice President reminded the committee members of their shared responsibility, even as he said, "We are all products of the public school system, and history will judge us harshly if we fail to change the narrative of this country."

Speaking earlier, Chairman of the Committee and Special Assistant to the President on Public Health, Office of the Vice President, Uju Okorocho, noted that the incursion of nutrition in Nigeria is far beyond health.

"The committee's mandate extends beyond healthcare, encompassing education and the broader socio-economic impact of malnutrition.

"The committee will focus on a multi-sectoral approach, ensuring coordinated efforts across government agencies to deliver effective solutions and meet multi-sectoral action targets. Innovative financing mechanisms will also be explored to further strengthen the fight against malnutrition," she said.

Okorocho emphasized the committee's vital role, just as she said, "The team here has the knowledge that we can leverage on to move the needle on the issue of malnutrition in Nigeria."

Committee members emphasized the need for a dedicated delivery unit within the Vice President's office to track progress and hold all stakeholders accountable.

They also advocated the establishment of nutrition departments across all government ministries and agencies, both at the national and sub-national levels.

Vatican Court jails Pope Francis' former Adviser, Angelo Becciu, over Financial Crimes

A Vatican court on Saturday sentenced a once powerful Italian cardinal to five years and six months in jail for financial crimes at the end of a historic trial.

Angelo Becciu, 75, a former adviser to Pope Francis who was once considered a papal contender himself, was the most senior clergyman in the Catholic Church to face a Vatican criminal court.

His lawyer, Fabio Vigliano, said they respected the sentence, which included an 8,000-euro (\$8,700) fine, but would appeal, continuing to insist on Becciu's innocence.

The cardinal had been accused of embezzlement, abuse of office and witness tampering, one of ten defendants in a trial focused on a disastrous investment by the Vatican in a luxury building in London.

They included financiers, lawyers and ex-Vatican employees accused of a range of financial crimes — all of who was found guilty Saturday were barring one, Becciu's former secretary Mauro

Carlino.

More than two and a half years after the trial opened, court president Giuseppe Pignatone read out sentences ranging from a fine to more than seven years in jail.

The court also ordered the confiscation from those convicted of 166 million euros, and ordered them to compensate the civil parties to the tune of more than 200 million euros.

The Holy See had declared itself "an offended party" and four Vatican entities were civil parties, claiming hundreds of millions of euros, including for moral and reputational damage. The trial shone a light on the Holy See's murky finances, which Pope Francis has sought to clean up since taking the helm of the Catholic Church in March 2013.

Just weeks before the first hearing, Francis gave the Vatican's civilian courts the power to try cardinals and bishops, where previously they were judged by a court presided over by cardinals.

At the heart of the trial was the purchase of a building in

London's upmarket Chelsea neighbourhood, which resulted in losses that the Vatican claimed dipped into resources intended for charity.

Becciu was found guilty of embezzlement over the decision to invest \$200 million in 2013-2014 into a fund run by financier Raffaele Mincione, which the judges said was hugely risky.

Some of this money went to buying part of the Sloane Avenue property — a deal in which the Vatican lost between 140 million and 190 million euros, according to prosecutors.

Prosecutor Alessandro Diddi had requested seven years and three months in jail for Becciu, who had always insisted he never took a cent.

Mincione was on Saturday jailed for five and a half years while another broker involved in the London deal, Gianluigi Torzi, was jailed for six.

The trial involved more than 80 hearings in the dedicated room within the Vatican Museums, where a portrait of a smiling Pope Francis hangs on the wall.

Commentary

THE RIVERS OF KARMA.

By Willie Amadi Esq

A couple of weeks ago the country was rudely woken up by news of an impeachment attempt by the G-27 members of the Rivers State House of Assembly allegedly orchestrated by the former governor and current minister of the FCT Barr. Nyesom Ezeunwo Wike against his godson Governor Siminaliyi Fugbara who is barely six months in office.

Many reasons were given to justify the impeachment by different interest groups namely;

SIN ONE: It was alleged that the Governor unilaterally stopped the payment of N2billion monthly allowance payable to the former Governor to which Wike denied sarcastically during a TV interview in his office in Abuja.

SIN TWO: A viral audio clip claimed that the internally generated revenue which stood at an average N10b during Wike's administration under Chief Whorlu, Chairman Rivers State Board of Internal Revenue his secondary school classmate suddenly dropped to N6billion after Wike's exit. This drastic shortfall was queried by Governor Siminaliyi who summoned the Chairman for explanations. Not satisfied with his explanations the Governor decided to invite Chief Chamberlin Peterside a former Commissioner for Finance under Barr. Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi's administration to assist him in rejigging the operations of the Board for optimal performance. This greatly enraged the former Governor.

SIN THREE: The third reason was the delay and or refusal to conduct local government election within his first three months in office by the Governor as agreed with Wike and the Speaker. The former Governor it is alleged, had as usual, single handedly handpicked all the candidates for the Chairmanship and Councillorship positions of the entire local governments in Rivers State for that election leaving the Governor without any reasonable input for those who will administer the local governments under his administration. Governor Siminaliyi dissatisfied with it on assumption of office based on realities on ground decided against the immediate conduct of local election and approached the Speaker with a list of Caretaker Committee members for the local government area for clearance in line with the law. The Speaker who was a party to the initial agreement reported back the Governor's request to the former Governor. It was at this point that the decision was taken by the duo to take the Governor out through an impeachment which eventually backfired.

SIN FOUR: It was equally alleged that the former Governor Wike had awarded contracts ahead of the tenure of the incumbent Governor's tenure and had secured the payments for the various contracts running into hundreds of billions of naira through bank guarantees from the banks warehousing the monthly federation account (FAC) account thereby foisting on his successor absolute compliance since the scheduled payments are deducted electronically at source on receipt of FAC. The Governor's decision to review some of these choking decisions and the commencement of some contracts in his senatorial area started by former Governor Barr. Rotimi Amaechi also infuriated former Governor Wike the most.

SIN FIVE: It was also alleged that the



Wike

former Governor Wike to his bones.

It was these cocktail of sins and the criminal tampering with the "structure" that provoked the decision to impeach Governor Siminaliyi from office forthwith. These selective patriotic and good governance motives of the Governor perhaps became a punishable offence. So assuming but not conceding that the above "sinful offences" are true, were they enough reasons to activate an impeachment process against the Governor without a private father and son explanations first sought and obtained, considering the security and political tension an outright declaration of war against an incumbent with wide access to State funds and power will occasion?

Obviously common sense and political tact was on vacation when this rash decision was taken by the non-State actors.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FAILED IMPEACHMENT MOVE AND MASS DEFECTIONS BY THE G-27 HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MEMBERS LED BY THE FORMER SPEAKER RT. HON. MARTIN CHIKE AMAEHULE.

1. The hegemony and number of members of the Rivers State House of Assembly has unfortunately depleted to 5 membership full quorum thereby denying the people of Rivers State robust, qualitative and comprehensive legislative benefits. The Supreme Court decisions are very clear and instructive on the issue of defections. Once a member defects to another political party his seat becomes vacant as soon as the Speaker declares it so and proceed to writes the Independent National Electoral Commission. This was done with the speed of sound.

2. With the suspension of the G-4 led by the former majority leader Rt. Hon. Edison Ehie who later was elected as Speaker by the G-4 as declared the authentic Speaker by the Order of the High Court, the Speaker and the House adopting the extant rules of the House proceeded and declared the defected seats vacant. Jurisprudentially, UNTILL that Order of the Court is vacated, varied or reversed by the Court of Appeal, the G-4 now G-5 will continue to legally preside and legislate for the good people of Rivers State including and not limited to the passage of the 2024 and other legislative functions going forward. The G-27 by the current



Fubara

prevailing legal framework and precedents are no longer members of the Rivers State House of Assembly pending the final determination of the matter by the Supreme Court. Therefore, their recent sitting in the House of Assembly quarters and purported amendment of the local government law are mere Riverwood frolic without any legal backing whatsoever. This is more pitiable when they sat in contemptuous disobedience of the court order barring them from parading themselves as members of the Rivers State House of Assembly pending the determination of the matter before the court.

3. Historically, Governor Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State worked with a 6-member House of Assembly when similar scenario played out between him and his godfather Jim Ifeanyichukwu Nwobodo. Governor Siminaliyi will legally partner with the G-5 until either the Appeal Court reverses the Order of the High Court or INEC conducts a fresh election to fill the vacant seats.

4. The over 90% handpicked appointees by the former Governor for his successor including the Chief of Staff, Secretary to the

government of Rivers State, the Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice and other key Commissioners such as of Finance, Works and information are endangered and can no longer be neutral in favour for a longer time as most of them have thrown in the towel to free their conscience and also reassure and firm up their loyalty to former Governor Wike their mentor.

5. The political class and the professional politicians will realign and continue to serve as raw materials and eat from the crumbs generated by the current political conflagration.

6. The local government council chairmen's tenure expires any moment from now and the Governor will take full charge of the local government administration through appointment of his direct loyalists and allies. The appointment of Caretaker Committees into the local government will be approved by the House of Assembly without delay as in the fastest passage of the budget in the history of the country.

7. The State Council of Traditional Rulers led by a no nonsense political war horse HRM Sergeant Awutse last week pledged absolute loyalty to Governor Siminaliyi while pleading with the former Governor to shield his sword for the interests of the people of Rivers State.

8. Regrettably, with the capture of the Judiciary, the Supreme Court where the former Governor would have tactically laid judicial ambush against unsuspecting Governor Siminaliyi rather than the usually protractive impeachment option may eventually and guidedly decide the fate of all concerned both named and unnamed. The option of impeachment by Wike is an own goal.

9. But God will speak last.

Finally, the avalanche of previous video vituperations about managing succession by Wike shows that the internet doesn't forget. Wike's travails is an eye opener to godfathers who do not factor God in their schemings. My advice to our brother Nyesom is to allow this calm sleeping bullmastiff dog lie for the overall interest of the Rivers people because this is a war where "if Siminaliyi doesn't win, he will not lose".

Willie Amadi, a Lawyer and Environmentalists writes from Owerri.

It was these cocktail of sins and the criminal tampering with the "structure" that provoked the decision to impeach Governor Siminaliyi from office forthwith. These selective patriotic and good governance motives of the Governor perhaps became a punishable offence.)



AFCON: Kalou warns Cote d'Ivoire against 'dangerous side' Super Eagles

... Plans to boost cooperation with Nigeria

Former Cote d'Ivoire forward, Salomon Kalou believes the Super Eagles of Nigeria will be a tough nut to crack for the Elephants at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations.

The host nation is drawn in Group A with Nigeria's Super Eagles. The two giants of African football will clash at the Alhassan Quattara Stadium, Ebimpe, Abidjan, on January 18.

Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau are the two other teams in Group A. Kalou labelled the Super Eagles a dangerous opponent and posited that the group will be a difficult one.

"Firstly, it's a group made up of very good teams, starting with Nigeria which is a very dangerous side. At each AFCON, the Super Eagles show great potential," Kalou told CAFonline.

"During the last edition, Equatorial Guinea did well, and Guin-

ea Bissau may be the surprise of the group. "We will have to respect all the teams and above all, win the first match to start the competition well, because that is where everything starts from."

Cote d'Ivoire will host the 34th edition of the AFCON finals from January 13 to February 11, 2024.

Meanwhile, The Ambassador of Côte d'Ivoire to Nigeria, Mr Kalilou Traore, has said that the 2024 African Cup of Nations, AFCON, will create relevant avenue for his country to further strengthen cooperation with Nigeria.

Traore stated this in an interview with newsmen on Sunday in Abuja, sequel to the country's preparation to host the AFCON tournament from Jan. 14 to Feb. 13, 2024.

He said it has become necessary for the two countries to use the opportunity to further boost diplomatic ties between them.

"The AFCON is also a big occasion for us to deepen cooperation. We will strengthen fraternity between our two countries.

"People who go to watch football matches will not just only see the matches, they will meet other people and will do business also.

"So, we as an Embassy, we are organising with our partners, we are packaging for those who want to participate in Abidjan at AFCON," he said.

The envoy added that leaders of both countries at levels of Heads of State and Heads of Ministries have mutual relationship, saying: "We have strong agreement, many agreements between Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire government".



Super Eagles of Nigeria

It's unacceptable, shut your mouth – Sherwood slams Man Utd Coach

Former Tottenham Hotspur manager, Tim Sherwood has hit out at Manchester United boss, Erik ten Hag for dropping two Red Devils stars (Kobbie Mainoo and Hannibal Mejbri) and attempting to sell two more – Scott McTominay and Harry Maguire.

Sherwood believes Ten Hag should be doing a lot better with the players available as he criticised the Dutchman for not playing two of Man United's most promising youngsters, Mainoo and Mejbri.

Man United have not been so impressive so far this season.

Ten Hag's side currently sit in the seventh position on the Premier League table ahead of their Sunday's clash with Liverpool at Anfield. "I'm not sure the players know what the process is. I'm sure he (Ten Hag) does," Sherwood said on Sky Sports.

"He makes all the right noises, he keeps himself very calm and he's a good talker. He needs to get a performance out of his side because at the moment there's no style of play. There is no improving of any individuals.

"I scratch my head when I look at the boy Hannibal [Mejbri]. A couple of months ago, he got back in the team, was outstanding and left out as soon as a 'superstar', like Amrabat or whoever, became fit.

"Kobbie Mainoo – who was outstanding when he came in – exactly the same has happened to him." He added, "He's had two players in Scott McTominay and Maguire who he wanted to get rid of and they are the two who have really stood up and tried to get him out of the mire."

"When you lose to Bournemouth at home, it's unacceptable

no matter what team you put out. We know they've got injuries and they tell us about them all the time. Every single club in the Premier League has got injuries.

"Keep your mouth shut, work on the training pitch and get them players to perform for that badge. At the moment they are not."



Sherwood



Ten Hag

What Onana need to succeed at Man Utd - Liverpool keeper

Liverpool goalkeeper, Alisson Becker has revealed that Andre Onana need to be 'patient' to adapt to life and succeed at Manchester United.

Onana swapped Inter Milan for Man United in a £47.2million deal in the summer. The Cameroonian has struggled to live up to that big price tag and has committed some errors since moving to the Premier League club. However, Becker made a similar move five-and-a-half years ago, joining Liverpool from

Made-in-Edo Keepers!

The trajectory of two Nigerian goalkeepers from Edo State performing well in the Nigerian Premier Football League

In times past, Nigeria was a country known for having some of the best goalkeepers on the continent and globally as well.

They have never been short of quality in that department at junior and senior levels.

From Sam Ibiam, Nigeria's pioneer goalkeeper popularly known as The Black Magnet in the late 1940s to the likes of Peter Fregene, Joe Erico, Emmanuel Okala, Lucky Agbonsevbafé, Best Ogedegbe, David Aigbovo, Peter Rufai, Wilfred Agbonavbare, Ike Shorunmu, Alloy Agu and Vincent Enyeama.

These goalkeepers occupy special places in Nigerian football folklore. Since Enyeama's exit from the team in 2015, his successors have been inconsistent and error prone except for Carl Ikeme whose fledging career was cut short by life-threatening Leukemia in 2017. The ailment also cost him a place at the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Since Ikeme left, the situation with the goalkeeping department of the Super Eagles has remained coaches' nightmare and a horrifying journey through the unknown for Nigerian football fans.

Interestingly, few of them have something in common, which is being from Edo State. Since inception, the state has produced good goalkeepers for the Nigerian national teams at all levels. These players include late Agbonavbare, Agbonsevbafé, Aigbovo and most recently Ambrose Vanzekin.

Now the goalkeeper trainer of Bendel Insurance Feeders, Vanzekin began his career with Plateau United before he returned home to Insurance in 2006. He was a member of the silver medallist Nigeria U-23 team at the 2008 Summer Olympics and formerly a member of both the U-17 team at 2003 FIFA U-17 World Championship and the U-20 team at 2005 FIFA World Youth Championship, where they were runners-up. He also stints with Akwa United and Warri Wolves in the NPFL.

Agbonavbare who died after being diagnosed of cancer in January 2015 played for Flying Eagles at the 1983 FIFA World Youth Championship in Mexico. He was also part of the 1994 AFCON squad as well as the 1994 FIFA World Cup.

Agbonsevbafé, now 54 was part of the Nigerian team that won the first edition of the 1985 Kodak/FIFA U-16 World Championship in China. He was also played for the U-20

team at the 1987 FIFA World Youth Championship in Chile as well as the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul.

From ruling the Principal's Cup in the 1970s with New Era College in Benin, another keeper legend from Edo State, Aigbovo, was instrumental to ICC Shooting Stars CAF Cup win in 1992 and was also invited to the Super Eagles.

Currently, two goalkeepers from Edo State, Kingdom Osayi of Doma United and Amas Obasogie of Bendel Insurance are the best goalies in the Nigeria Premier Football League based on their statistics.

As at match-day 13 of the current NPFL season, Kingdom Osayi has kept 11 clean sheets for Doma United who are second in the Nigeria's topflight division with 25 points a point adrift leaders Remo Stars.

Osayi has also being instrumental to Doma's springing a surprise in the league last season, when they almost picked a Super 6 spot in their debut season in the topflight.

Due to his impressive performance so far this season, he was touted for a place in the Super Eagles provisional list for the 2023 AFCON.

The 19-year-old was previously on the roster of MFM FC before the team got relegated in 2022.

Bendel Insurance goalie, Amas Obasogie, has also being a standout goalkeeper for the Benin Arsenal since last season.

On their return to the topflight, he was in goal for all matches as they were unbeaten for 21 games in all competitions. His penalty saves during the Federation Cup also handed them the FA Cup title, their first title in 43 years. He continued in that form in the preliminary round of the CAF Confederation Cup, saving a penalty during open play and another in the shootout against Algerian club, ASO Chlef.

This season, Obasogie's nine clean sheets in 12 games earned him a call up into the Super Eagles camp for the 2026 World Cup qualifiers against Lesotho and Zimbabwe, although he was unused in both games. Before match-day 13, he had only conceded two goals this season.

Anambra Public servants receive 20,000 Christmas bonus as Soludo pledges continued support *Pg.7*

Governor Nwifuru promises to prioritise elders', widows' welfare *Pg.2*

Obi Nwigwe's love for industry, community development

Ndigbo collectively suffer from one ailment: their inability to invest home. That is, majority of Igbo investors, intreprenuers and businessmen do not set up their businesses anywhere near the South East. They prefer investing elsewhere, be it in the Diaspora or any available space within the enclave. Igbo's businesses outside the region are said to be about N45t!!!

However, one man who has joined the league of "Think Home PhilosophyPhilosophy" (Akuruo Ulo) is Evangelist (Dr) Leo Obi Nwigwe, an engineer by profession. Obi Nwigwe who also doubles as the Mayor byte Mbutu, Aboh Mbase, Imo State, has worked assiduously, and as a man of vision, established LEOSKY

OIL & GAS Limited, a subsidiary of LEOSKY OIL SERVICES NIGERIA LIMITED.

Incorporated with the Corporate Affairs Commission, CAC, with NUPRC (DPR) approval and located at Uvuvu Amawu Mbutu, it offers quality cooking gas refill, gas cylinder sales, all gas accessories sales and gas cooking pots.

Asked why he established his firm in Mbutu rather than the usual practice of Ndigbo taking their businesses outside the South East, Obi Nwigwe said, "Time has come for us to start thinking home because, North or South, home is the best. Ir means for Igbo nation to grow and develop, Igbo businessmen must start bringing our businesses to South East. I am proud of Aba, Nnewi and Onitsha and we can do more to fight insecurity, joblessness ans hunger".

Obi Nwigwe noted that for further inquiries about his business, contact must be made to, LEOSKY OIL & GAS LTD on 08037263034, 07043868415 or email leosky99@yahoo.com.

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