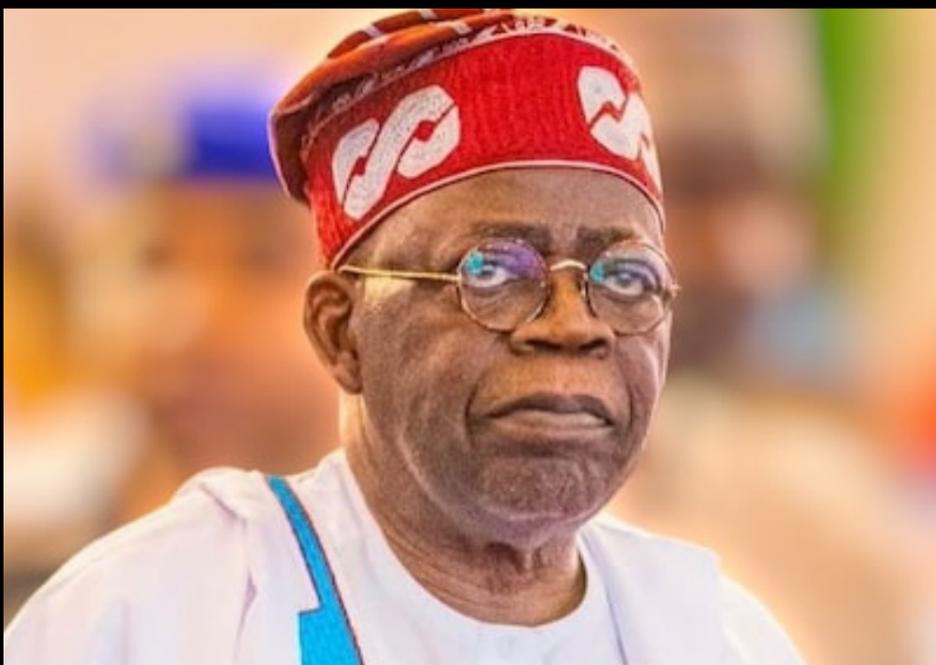


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News

Level of poverty in Nigeria threatening country's security – Anambra Lawmaker

Soludo's wife weeps during visits to orphanages in Anambra

A member of the Anambra State House of Assembly, representing Awka South 1 constituency, Henry Mbachur has decried the level of poverty in Nigeria.

The lawmaker who took a tour of some markets in his constituency said with the level of poverty ravaging a good number of Nigerians, it is evident that the country's national security, stabil-

ity and unity will be threatened if it continues. Mbachur called for a more sustainable approach to tackling the country's increasing rate of poverty.

"My engagements have been focused more on the people, especially the poor who live below the poverty line. The level of poverty and inequality in Nigeria today threatens national security, stability and unity.

"That is why we are touring some markets in this constituency, distributing seed capitals to local market men and women.

"Well-to-do individuals should be done with 'dorime' and 21 years old liquor. The cost of one bottle of exotic drink can end ex-cruciating poverty in many families. This is the time to change approach," he im-plored.

He emphasizes that creat-ing more job opportunities for the underprivileged and implementing economic and institutional reforms for efficiency would elevate in-comes.

He also called on young people to come out and as-sist the government in the fight against corruption by being active partners in monitoring projects, devel-opment and growth of their local communities.

Wife of Anambra State Governor, Dr. Nonye Solu-do, was in tears yesterday as she visited orphanages in Onitsha and its environs.

As a result, she has prom-ised to undertake surgery for a child with cerebral palsy in one of the children's homes in Onitsha.

She visited three registered homes where she discussed with the management of the homes on the need to take up the treatment of one of the inmates.

The governor's wife, who had visited five of the 39 reg-istered homes, promised to visit all community homes in the state before Christ-mas. She said the visit was to extend love and kindness to the children's homes, as a way of reassuring them that they are not alone in their plight.

She described Christmas as period of showing love,

compassion and support to one another. Mrs. Soludo urged well-meaning indi-viduals, corporation organ-isations and groups to reach out to the needy and make the Christmas celebration a special one for them.

The Manager, Onitsha North Children's Home, Mrs. Rita Anekwe, ex-pressed appreciation to the governor's wife, saying the gesture would put smiles on the faces of the children. Mrs. Soludo distributed items such as bags of rice and beans, tubers of yam, toiletries, beverages, as well as cash to the homes.

They are Onitsha North Community Children's Home, In-land Town; Onit-sha South Motherless Bab-ies Home, Odoakpu and Missionaries of Charity/ Gift of Mercy Community Children and Compassion-ate Home/ Orphanage, Fegge-Onitsha.

Uzodimma assents to 2024 Appropriation Bill

Governor Hope Uzodimma of Imo State on Monday assented to the 2024 Appropriation Bill of N592.2 billion.

At a brief ceremony after signing the bill into an Act at the Government House, Owerri, Uzodimma said that the success of the budget would depend on the prudent implementation of the items contained in the document.

He assured the people of the state that the budget would act both as a stim-ulus and catalyst for the growth and development of Imo in line with the theme: "Budget of Renewed Eco-nomic Growth."

"In the history of Imo, there has not been an an-nual budget with a capital expenditure of over 82 per cent, meaning when im-plemented, the result will make Imo the envy of other states," he said.

He commended the Speaker and members of the State House of Assem-bly for the uncommon syn-ergy and conceding to his request to give the bill accel-erated hearing and passage.

The Governor, who con-gratulated Imo people as the ultimate beneficiaries of the synergy between the executive and legislature, promised prudent imple-mentation of the budget. He urged everyone working for government to do the same.

He also promised to sus-tain the cordial relationship and synergy that existed between the three arms of government. He, however, called for all hands to be on deck to raise the revenue proposed in the budget to enable his administration ensure total implementa-tion and achievement of the budget target.

He called for strict clo-sure of all revenue leakag-

es in the state, promising to "deal with all those who are fraudulent and the crimi-nally-minded in the govern-ment circle.

"Government will be ruth-less to any public officer or appointee who engages in fraud and corruption in this administration, going forward. "I will leave no stone unturned in advancing the cause of Imo," he said. Presenting the bill to the governor, the Speaker, Mr Chike Olemgbe, said the bill brought to them was "care-fully crafted", which made their job "easy and seam-less".

According to him, the proposal shows that the governor is determined to give Imo people "renewed overall growth and develop-ment".

The speaker promised that the lawmakers would work as partners with the execu-tive to ensure that Imo peo-

ple enjoyed the dividend of democracy under his and Uzodimma's leadership.

He said that the bill passed through all the legislative processes from the day it was presented on December 12 to its passage.

Governor to UNICEF, UNDP: We're determined to eradicate poverty in Anambra

Anambra State Gov-ernor Chukwuma Soludo has given a rundown of the programmes his administration is imple-menting and other efforts being made to stamp out pov-erty.

Prof. Soludo, at a two-day Partnership Roundtable Meeting attended by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), said his government was making ef-forts to uproot poverty.

Launching the event-organised by the Ministry of Budget and Economic Plan-ning, in collaboration with UNICEF at Best Western Meloch Hotel, Awka, Soludo said through the massive em-ployment of teachers, health care workers, promotion of industrialisation and others, his administration had re-duced poverty.

The governor, represent-ed by his Commissioner for Budget and Economic Plan-ning, Mrs. Chiamaka Nnake, assured UNICEF, United

Nations Development Pro-gramme (UNDP) and other social development organi-sations of more partnership next year and beyond; saying their working relationship so far had been cordial.

He said the government would continue to partner the international organisations on programmes that would help his administration to end poverty and improve the well-being of 'NdE Anam-bra' and other residents of the state. "The current-ad-ministration is making efforts towards industrialising the state.

"Anambra State has taken steps towards promoting in-clusive growth, equality, se-curity and a life of dignity for all. Over the past 20 months, the state government has re-formed social sectors in the state," he said.

The governor said he was working to improve the In-ternally Generated Revenue (IGR) of the state through the expansion of economic

activities, attraction of more investments and exploitation of the abundant resource de-posits across the state. "Our administration is clear about its governance philosophy of transparency, traceability and holding public office holders to account," he said.

Soludo hailed UNICEF, UNDP and others for their support, saying they had add-ed value to the state through their programmes.

UNICEF Enugu Chief of Field Office, Juliet Chiluwe, praised Soludo for his efforts to develop the state for the benefit of the people, espe-cially the children.

She said the social protec-tion policy of the govern-ment would improve key aspects of human capital development in the state, including social assistance, social care, social insurance, labour market interventions, micro and small enterprises development and comple-mentary measures for social protection in the state.

Yuletide: Anarah assures Anambrarans of safety

The Commissioner for Homeland Matters of Anambra State, Chief Chikodi Anarah has assured citizens of the State of their safety as they return to celebrate the Christmas and New Year.

According to a statement by the public relations of-ficer of Anambra Vigilante Services (AVS), Mr. Nweke Nweke, the assurance be-came necessary following the continued trial and det-ention of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) leader Nnamdi Kanu, which cast a dark shadow on security in the South East Part of the statement read:

"In line with the present apprehension of people in the Southeast after the rul-ing of the Supreme Court on the continued detention of the leader of the Indige-nous People of Biafra, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the Anam-bra State Commissioner for Homeland Matters, Chief Chikodi Anarah, has said that the state government is aware that some miscre-

ants would capitalize on the pronouncement of the Su-preme Court to cause trou-ble and all manner of brig-andage, and he urged the citizens of the State not to worry on the empty threats of the hoodlums.

"The state government has reassured all law-abid-ing citizens of the State of the government's continued strive to protect lives and property in the area, and that the government has spotted flash points across the State.

"There are already sus-tained efforts of the Neigh-borhood Watch and the Joint Task Force on Secu-rity as both are battle-ready to take on any person or group of persons found to be perpetrating insecurity in the state".

Mr. Nweke Nweke quot-ing Chief Anarah said the State Neighborhood Watch has extended its operations to all the boundaries of Anambra State, with the aimed of checkmating the movement of strange faces

with warring on all within the boundary areas to com-port themselves in a manner that will not lead them into a fracas with the security agencies.

Anarah also called on the citizens to complement Governor Chukwuma Solu-do's ambition to recover the entire state from the hands of the men of the under-world, charging the people of the state to always avail the security personnel with useful information that could make them nip the hoodlums actions on the bud.

He added: "This is a fes-tive period and I am aware that some of the enemies of the State may likely raise their heads, but my assur-ance is that we are going to crush them at any time they come up.

"Security should be seen as everyone's business and that is why I am appealing to everyone to play his or her own role in making this season, a hitch-free", he said.

Tension as civil war veterans announce date for protes

Retired soldiers who served on the side of the Federal Govern-ment during the Civil War have issued a threat to protest on January 15, 2024, due to the non-payment of their pensions, even 40 years after the war concluded.

In a statement released on Monday by their national co-ordinator, Babawande Phil-ip, and National Secretary, Okewuyi Bayo, the veterans criticized the Federal Gov-ernment for neglecting them despite their sacrifices to pre-serve the unity of Nigeria.

"We are displeased with

the way the successive gov-ernments have treated us. De-spite several letters and other entreaties to call their atten-tion to our plights, we have been neglected.

In October we wrote the President, the National As-sembly, and the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Military Pension Board, and Ministry of De-fence. To date, we have not heard a word from them.

"We consider the treatment meted out to us by the Fed-eral Government as unfair and a disservice to the sacrifice we made to ensure the nation re-

mains as one. "It is heart-rend-ing to see our colleagues who fought against the govern-ment get the monthly pension while we have been struggling for the last 40 years.

It is worthy to note that many of our members have died in the struggle. "On this note, we have resolved to commence another round of nationwide protests to press home our demand. We have been pushed to the wall and we believe this is the only way to get what we deserve. Start-ing from January 15, we will be taking to the streets.

News

New tenant disappears with neighbours' four children in Abia

Four children belonging to three neighbours have been taken away by their new neighbour who just packed in three days earlier in Umuahia, Abia state, police have confirmed.

The tenants, all women who are also petty traders, are Madam Ngozi Kingsley; Madam Ifeanyi Uduma, sister to Ngozi Kingsley and Madam Blessing Peter Obasi from Nwoke compound, Elugwu Nguzu

Edda in Ebonyi State.

The women claimed that the suspected abductor, whose identity is yet to be known, packed into the building on Thursday, December 15 as a new tenant, along with another person said to be her sister, friend or an accomplice.

The suspect was said to have packed in with only a camp gas, a 6-inch small foam and a mat, with a little bag suspected to be her dresses. They also said that

they noted that while in the house, the two "mysterious" tenants only tied similar wrappers, an indication that they had few clothes with them.

"Within the first two days, they endeared themselves into the heart of the rest of their neighbours as women who love children by playing with them, buying them gifts as well as sending them on errands, and at a time, went to buy brooms and other items

with one of the grown up children that later escaped abduction by the suspects", one of the women said.

In her words, Madam Uduma said she treaded with caution not suspecting any foul intention by the suspect. She said, "On one occasion, one of my children came out of the house of the suspects wearing a white cloth with red spots" which she said she quickly removed from the child and was queried by the suspects why she did so.

Uduma, who said she came into Umuahia from Ohafia this year, narrated that having been subjected to hardship in her home town, decided to relocate with her children to Umuahia to enable her sister, Ngozi Kingsley, to assist her with her fish business at local markets.

According to her, within the two days, the suspect and her friend cooked food and gave to the children who would playfully enter into the suspects' room.

"That Saturday, she bought them drinks and gave them biscuits and later gave them food to eat.

The suspect also gave another tenant in the house food, and even me. "Later, they dressed my last child with white cloth with red spots like flower. My child came to me excited to show me.

I removed the cloth and dressed my child with her cloth and the woman came and asked me why I removed the cloth from my child. I told her that I wanted my child to wear my own cloth. It was not long before the suspect disappeared all four kids with no trace.

Confirming the incident in a press statement, the Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Maureen Chinkanda, said.

"At present, the police have arrested some suspects associated with the unknown tenant and investigation is in progress to determine the whereabouts of the children," he however noted, "The complainant, Mrs. Ibe, brought this report to the attention of the

police a day after the incident occurred.

"The public is strongly advised to report matters of this nature immediately to the police control room as soon as they discover such occurrences before physically reporting the incident at the police station."

"Avoid entrusting underage children to unfamiliar individuals and maintain a vigilant approach when minors are seen with adult companions.

"Interview both the child and the accompanying person; if unsatisfied with explanations, involve the police for necessary action," she further advised.

Recall that the disappearance of four kids in Abia was after a tricycle operator was engaged by their mother to drop them at school.

A user on the microblogging platform, X also posted a video of a man tracked down with kids in his house after luring them with gifts in Abia state.



Representative of the Imo State Commissioner of Police presented with an award by the Imo State NUJ during their just concluded 2023 Press Week in Owerri.

Uzodimma inaugurates Imo small claims court

Imo State Governor, Hope Uzodimma, yesterday, inaugurated the state-owned Small Claims Court, with the charge to officers to dispense their judicial duties without delays.

The court came into effect on December 1, 2023, and will adjudicate on cases of N5million or less, excluding cost. At the event, which was held at Justice B. A. Njemanze, Pavilion, High Court Complex, Owerri, the governor, represented by his deputy, Prof. Placid Njoku, disclosed that the statutory specialised court was necessary to enable adjudication and resolution of disputes involving small amounts of money, stressing that it was created for specific duties with powers, procedure and simplified rules.

He also noted that it would be less expensive and faster than the traditional court. Uzodimma, called for application and appointment of judicial officers, who are sensitive to needs of the people, according to the law, to adjudicate on such matters in the State Small Claims Court.

Also, the state's Chief Judge, Theresa Chukwue meka Chikeka, said the con-

ventional method of justice delivery system was cumbersome, time consuming and sometimes frustrating with a backlog of cases, which are delayed.

She added that with the new court, cases of the required nature could be dispensed procedurally. She disclosed that the Imo State Magistrates' Courts Law Practice Directions - 2023, which has designated some magistrates to the court, would regulate the Small Claims Court.

Justice Chikeka said: "Law, indeed, is dynamic as it grows daily, and we must continue to update our knowledge to meet the changes that take place. "For the judiciary, the idea of a Small Claims Court is most welcome, as it accords with the globally cherished idea of access to justice for all and people centred justice.

"It is commonly understood that the court is the last hope of the common man to get justice, and since justice delayed is justice denied, similarly "hurried justice is hurried justice."

She stressed that both are to be avoided in the pursuit of justice, saying that was why the courts, in its wisdom, decided on a maximum of 60 working days for determination of matters on the Small Claims Court rather than the two days to one week being postulated by people.

Enugu multi-sectoral plan on food, nutrition ready for implementation - Mbah

The wife of Enugu State Governor, Mrs Nkechinyere Mbah, says that the Enugu Multi-Sectoral Plan on Food and Nutrition is ready for implementation to check stunted growth and underweight infants and children.

Mbah said this while flagging-off an advocacy sensitization meeting for Women in Policy Positions and Wives of Political Leaders in Enugu State on "Zero Water and Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes".

The sensitisation was organised by Enugu State Primary Health Care Development Agency (ENS-PHCDA) in collaboration with the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). The governor's wife, who was represented by the Commissioner for Children, Gender and Social Development, Mrs Ngozi Enih, noted that the multi-sectoral plan would soon be implemented to ensure the state kick-out malnutrition even from the onset of life.

According to her, some critical policies the government has already implemented to show its commitment towards infant and

maternal protection is "the free child and maternal care programme.

"Another programme is the establishment of crèche to support adequate six months exclusive breastfeeding by nursing mothers for civil servants," she said.

The governor's wife noted that she remained committed to see Enugu State children feed well and develop to maximum potential despite the severe impact of food scarcity ravaging the world especially Africa, with Nigeria making the top list.

"Today, through our collaborations and collective efforts, we will achieve a process that will, in turn, produce responsible individuals who will take over our society in the near future, and this will make for a better society," she added.

Speaking, Dr Ifeyinwa Ani-Osheku, Executive Secretary of Enugu State Primary Health Care Development Agency (ENS-PHCDA), noted that one of the most effective ways to stimulate a healthy workforce starts with maternal and child wellbeing being propelled by exclusive breastfeeding.

Ani-Osheku noted that the best immunization vial to be

given to the child leading to a healthy social and psychological development is solely exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and after that mixed with soft food for another one year.

According to her, there was a need to push to give breastfeeding mothers compulsory paid maternity leave for six months and the father a compulsory paid paternity leave for him to assist his nursing wife and bond properly with the new-born child.

She said: "The objectives of the sensation included: To create awareness among women in policy making positions on the burden of malnutrition and mobilise

them as change agents in the state.

"To identify opportunities and barriers to implementation of the state Strategic Plan and other nutrition policies in the state; and to develop action plans on demand creation for investment in nutrition, steps to support and roll out complementary infant and young child feeding."

The executive secretary noted that exclusive breastfeeding had a lot of great benefits, which are: reduced illness of the infant; build-up immunity of the infant; reduced out of pocket expense of the family; and checking of breast and ovarian cancers.

Abia Christmas Village Festival: Mayor of Umuahia North endorses project

The Mayor of Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State Hon. High Chief Victor Ikeji has described the Abia Christmas Village Festival project as a laudable project and promised that the LGA will support the event.

The Mayor who endorsed the project during a working visit by the Project

team, encouraged the team to do their best and improve in subsequent editions.

He also advised the project team to involve the private sector more in driving the event. While speaking during the interaction, the Abia Christmas Village Festival project coordinator Emenike Jason Iroegbu, explained that the 7 days long event is meant to provide

the needed entertainment in the Abia State capital city of Umuahia for the yuletide season and to grow the entertainment economy in the state.

He revealed that the 7-day event is programme-packed and that the event will add glamour to the city of Umuahia and gradually develop the city into a destination point.

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Editorial

When will the squandering stop?

Very so often, news about Nigeria and its leaders, is profoundly concerning. Worrysome. Whenever Tinubu presidency is over, I suggest that it should be taught as history lesson in schools – on how not to govern a country on the basis of propaganda and tapestry of lies. Governance is a serious, honest, human enterprise. It should not be the opposite. Amid a blizzard of shocking revelations of bizarre profligacy in less than seven months in power, it shows some clear, but disturbing issues about power and leadership in Nigeria. First, nothing that happens to a country that is not like their leaders.

Secondly, power is like a bikini: it reveals more than it can hide. In other words, what leaders do when they are trying to get power is not necessarily what they do after they have it. This is Tinubu and the All Progressives Congress revealed. It's an unravelling story that will perhaps get worse with the passage of time. This is a government of contradiction.

What we are witnessing today is not how to run a country and 'Renew Hope'. It's exactly what historians foresightedly warn us to beware of manipulative and devious leaders who are always searching out, trading favours and flattering, exploiting the weaknesses of pliant and servile politicians in the parliament. And once they have achieved the power they so ruthlessly sought, there's nothing more to achieve, no vision of any breathtaking scope, no real agenda to accomplish real goals for the vast suffering majority the people other than personal aggrandizement and that of cronies, at the expense of an economy in dire straits. Isn't that where Nigeria is today? The portrait of this administration in just seven months in office can fittingly be likened to the famous Titanic luxury passenger liner whose crew indulged in revelry, unconscious that the ship was sinking. It was a romantic disaster. Nigeria is nearing a shipwreck right now. It's like a company under receivership, but the leadership and managers of the economy managers seem not to care, even when the red flags are evident.

These are the facts, the cold hard evidence. In seven months of Tinubu administration, many multinational companies have exited Nigeria, citing "challenging business environment and difficulty in creating U.S. dollar value". First, it was Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK plc), a global leader in pharmaceutical products. GSK left in September. Days ago, Proctor & Gamble P&G), another multinational consumer goods manufacturers, announced its pulling out of Nigeria. Nigeria's economy, according to statistics, is expected to lose a hefty \$335 million (about N310bn) in foreign direct investment. The amount represents the combined assets value of P&G, and Equinox, another global player in the upstream oil sector. In total, 20,000 workers, majority of them Nigerians, are expected to lose their jobs.

Yet, the insatiable appetite of our politicians remains unchanged, amid soaring cost of governance and worsening hunger index in the land. What does that tell President Tinubu? It means his recent globe-trotting to woo foreign investors is yielding the opposite results. In a serious, saner clime, this is bound to have political repercussions. But not in Nigeria. Like drunken sailors, the 'party' goes on, regardless of the economic headwinds pointing to a country careening dangerously towards bankruptcy. In an address delivered recently at the Chief of Defence Intelligence Annual Conference, in Abuja, National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, claimed that the Tinubu government inherited a bankrupt country which had resulted in budgetary constraints. He told his audience, "it's important

for you to know that we inherited a difficult situation, literally, a bankrupt country. No money to point to where we can say that all the money we are getting now; we are paying back what was taken from this country".

Perhaps prearranged, President Tinubu at the same time in faraway Saudi Arabia then, told the Vice President (Country Programmes) of the Islamic Bank, Dr Mansur Muktar, "we inherited serious liabilities and also assets from our predecessor, but we have no excuses to give". But, excuses now abound to justify lack of performance. Do the extravagant, reckless expenditures of this government and its officials show an administration that has shown any scintilla of respect for financial prudence? Rather, what we have seen is a deceitful, vision-less government and its officials who feed fat at the expense of the economy and the people. It's not unkind to say that what is unfolding before our very eyes is a rapid descent into unprecedented profligacy and a spineless, servile National Assembly that has sold out. And you ask: where has conviction politics gone?

During the president's presentation of the 2024, the world was shocked to see elected officials singing Tinubu's campaign slogan rather than the National Anthem? What a shame! Multilateral financial institutions are watching the recklessness of the government and its officials. The outrage that greeted Nigeria's oversized delegation to the recent Conference on Climate Change, COP28, in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, says it all: this is a government of contradiction, living in denial, trading blames, and dishing out tissues of lies. While this government claimed it inherited a bankrupt economy, it has by far, worsened it. Nigeria's delegation of 1,411 at COP28, was the third largest in the world, and largest encourage in Africa. Some government officials allegedly went to Dubai with their harem and relatives who had no business whatsoever to do in Dubai. Even if government's claim that it sponsored only 422 delegates to the conference, the total amount reported to have been spent on these delegates as flight ticket, to- and from Dubai, amounted to N880 million. The waste of public resources is happening at a time Nigeria is spending about 96 percent of its revenue to service debts that have accumulated to all-time high of N87 trillion, soaring inflation rate of 27.33 percent, crushing poverty and out-of-control exchange rate. It seems nothing is shocking anymore about Nigeria. What happened at the COP28 did happen when the dust is yet to settle over the N7.5trn reportedly spent on the purchase of SUV vehicles for the members of the National Assembly, and the N20.5bn voted for the renovation of the vice president's residence in Abuja.

During the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September, the government reportedly spent \$507,374 (equivalent to N391 million) on hotel accommodation for the President at the prestigious St. Regis hotel in New York. According to a memo obtained by Foundation for Investigative Journalism, dated Sept 11, and signed by the Permanent Secretary, State House, Mr Adebisi Olufunso, \$422,820 (N325.5m) covered the cost of rooms booked for President Tinubu and his close aides. According to the memo, the remaining amount, \$84,564 (N65.1m) which is 20 percent of the hotel reservation cost, was for incidentals. Hotel incidental charges include the cost of services and amenities that are not provided in the estimated room rates. Those familiar with St. Regis hotel say the cost of a room, including taxes and fees, is as high as \$17,273 per night. The cheapest room rate is about \$915 a night.

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Opinion

'Agberos', transport unions and public order

By Adesegun Ogundeji

Popularly referred to as Agbero, operators of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and Road Transport Employers of Nigeria (RTEAN), are major actors in the transportation sector of Lagos State, and indeed other states across the country.

To some, agberos are into legitimate undertakings, while others simply see them as interlopers who compound the state's transportation challenges.

However, irrespective of contrary opinions, in the real sense of it, the agbero, by its original concept, is doing a legitimate business. Shocked? No doubt, I am sure a lot will be surprised to hear this, but don't crucify me yet.

Just wait a minute! Is a travel agent doing a legitimate business? Well, the answer is yes. By implication, if a travel agent is doing a legitimate business, then an agbero is equally into a legitimate business. The point is that our understanding of Agbero does not tally with its original conception.

What an agbero (commuter's link man) does is not different, by inference, from what a travel agent does. Agberos have been operating in the transport sector since the days of the yore, acting as middlemen between the transporters and commuters. It is quite plausible that the 'Gen Z' might find it tough to understand this narrative because time has changed.

In those days, willing travellers booked seats ahead with the agbero who in turn informed the transporter to reserve a specific number of seats for people who had booked ahead with him. The implication is that if you are not on that itinerary, you go nowhere. Are you getting the gist?

Therefore, for his time and efforts in gathering passengers for the vehicle, the transporter gives him an agreed percentage of the fare. In-fact, in the olden days, travellers who live far from the Agbero's (travel agent) abode sleeps over in his house so as not to miss the bus.

I experienced this in my series of travels to Ikuehi, Ihima in the now Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State. Adi Jimoh was the transport agent of Suru Ohu ni (Surulere) Transport Company in Ikorodu. His base was Ojogbe, while Idi Mangoro in Agege was the major loading point for vehicles going to Ebiraland, generally referred to as Okene.

As school resumption approached, the agent informed our



Sanwo-Olu



Oreagba

parents when a vehicle will be available. The same happened upon vacation.

What I have laboured to establish from the foregoing is to give legitimacy to the business of agbero both historically and legitimately. But then, in relation to the concept established thus far, does agbero still exist in Lagos?

I dare to say no. Those roughnecks, guttural voices and fierce looking men we now call agberos are mere opportunistic elements extorting money from hardworking drivers.

Today, no one acts again as a travel agent for anyone, at least those travelling by road. Not even on the inter-state routes. In the modern era, there are designated parks (public and private) where vehicles are ready for boarding. The traveller is, therefore, at liberty to plan his trip without the help of an agent.

Therefore, agbero, in its present form, is nothing but a fraud. But what of the NURTW and RTEAN? Are they still relevant? In my view, they are. They are not different from the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) and even the Nigeria Labour Congress. They were established and registered to protect the interest of their members.

The major difference, however, lies in the fact that while the road transport associations deploy crude methods to collect their dues on the roads, others do the same through more dignifying tactics. Their members pay through monthly deductions. They maintain a verifiable membership list and relate with their members decently.

This is one area that the transport unions need to work on as the only nexus between them and their members (drivers) is the daily 'extortion'.

Thus, the modus operandi of

incident shows that it was a ploy to divert attention as evidence clearly shows that most of the main actors were no drivers. They were union members who see the enforcement of rules against commercial vehicles stopping in some places where they extort money from drivers as robbing them of 'revenue'.

This is not to say that there are no proven cases of some law enforcement operatives going overboard and beyond their rules of engagement, but a fair assessment of road use in the state reveals that traffic laws are obeyed in reverse order.

The law enforcement agents are attacked verbally and physically. In some cases, the attacks have led to the death of innocent people, especially those delivering crucial public services to the people.

Lagos drivers, especially commercial bus operators, want to have things done their way, irrespective of the pains they cause to other road users. They hate enforcement of rules and regulations. Their sympathizers and co-law breakers are quick at accusing the government of trying to generate revenue from traffic offenders.

Truth is that fines are not taxes and levies. Payment of fines is optional, depending on if you are willing to obey the rules. The truth is that enforcement costs the government more than the possible revenue that might accrue from the so-called fines.

The agberos no longer have any business on the roads. They have outlived their usefulness. On the other hand, the NURTW and RTEAN, being legal entities, should opt for more civilized ways of conducting their activities without constituting public nuisance. This is the 21st century, Lagos deserves the best.

“ The major difference, however, lies in the fact that while the road transport associations deploy crude methods to collect their dues on the roads, others do the same through more dignifying tactics. Their members pay through monthly deductions. They maintain a verifiable membership list and relate with their members decently. This is one area that the transport unions need to work on as the only nexus between them and their members (drivers) is the daily 'extortion'. ”

News

Insecurity: Nollywood actors, entertainers call for peace in South East

Following the unfortunate air of insecurity and violence that has prevailed in the Southeast and its attendant effects on the economy, education of the youths and social life, Nollywood actors, musical artists and other performers in the entertainment industry, mainly from the south east extraction have signed up to a new initiative to totally restore peace in the region.

They made the call during a courtesy call on the deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Benjamin Kalu in Abuja.

According to them, the situation in the Southeast region is an ill wind that blows no good to anyone, the actors however said that such was alien to the people of the zone.

To this end, the actors pledged to support the Peace in South East Project (PISE-P), an initiative of the national assembly members led by the deputy speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Benjamin Okezie Kalu that craves for non-kinetic means of resolving the issue of insecurity in the zone.

The actors vowed to use their talents and skills to preach the message of peace to Ndigbo, Nigerians and the world at large. The A-class actors led by Jim Iyke were Zack Orji, Yul Edochie, Destiny Etiko, Ekene Umenwa Obodo, Okechukwu - Edwards Ukeje (Mr Raw), Benedict Johnson, Francis Duru, Noble Igwe, Tina Mbah and a host of others.

In his remarks, the deputy speaker lauded the creative

spirits of the actors, saying that it was time to use their talents to propagate the gospel of peace and restoration in the south east. Kalu said that the ripple effects of insecurity has touched on every facet of life in the region.

He said that the statistics painted a grim picture on trading losses of up to N3.8 trillion due to the sit-at-home on Mondays just as the transportation sector losses were up to N13 billion, and small businesses crippled by daily losses due to the violence.

He added that the shadow casts by insecurity extends far beyond the economic losses, stressing that it suffocates the breath of creativity. Kalu however said that PISE-P which will be unveiled on December 29, 2023 in Bende Local Government Area of

Abia State has articulated 8 cardinal pillars of Education; Agriculture; Commerce/Industry; Infrastructural Development; Culture and Tourism; Sports/Entertainment; Governance/Leadership and Reconciliation/Rehabilitation/Reintegration to tackle the challenges, urging all hand on deck.

He said: That is why, in response to the challenges of the South East, a different kind of song is rising – the song of the Peace in South East Project (PISE-P). PISE-P is not about guns and boots; for the sounds of guns and the barrels of guns have not helped us in solving the problem in south east.

Militarization has not helped us. Kinetic approach to resolving the problem has not been the best solution. If it is not, then there must be something out there that is better than the guns. It is about education, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, and cultural revival.

It is about restoring the fertile ground where your tal-

ents can take root and soar. "These are the tools, pillars upon which PISE-P stands. How do we use what we have to create peace?"

How do we use what we have to create peace? How do we bring in those ones who are in the bush, offer them free education? How do we use entrepreneurial skills to give them sense of inclusion by telling those people who are angry and agitating?

We can give you a grant of N1 to N2 million and say come out from the bush. We can help you start a life. Take the grant, let's mentor you through the Igba-Boi or let us support your business.

"How do we use agriculture, we have arable land, fertile land across south east, how do we introduce mechanized farming, increase more people that we will employ there, reduce unemployment rate in the south east, calm the nerves of those who are agitating, focus them where they can go and produce more for the nation through our region. How do you use infra-

structure, how do we bring in those in the hinterlands and calm the nerves of those who feel they are not included?"

I can go on and on. This is what PISE-P stands for. We can no longer wait for government to do it for us.

"That's why we are coming up with this platform which we must buy into to raise funds all around the world. There are organizations that are interested in peace and if building infrastructure will bring peace, they will come. If building those health centres will bring peace, they will come and partner with us.

If redefining agriculture to mechanized farming will bring peace, they will come. If increasing the number of classroom blocks will bring peace, they will come. But they are looking for a platform. PISE-P is that platform".

Kalu who enjoined the actors to deploy their talents towards restoring peace in south east said he was tired of seeing innocent blood of his brothers spilled on the streets.



Nollywood actors and entertainers sue for peace in South east in picture with Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives Benjamin Kalu.

We've strategized for Yuletide celebrations - Anambra Vigilante

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

The Anambra Vigilante Group, AVG, Obosi Urban Unit, Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State has said they have strategized to contend with criminal elements, during and after this year's yuletide celebrations, warning evil children from possible responsible parents never to gamble with their lives through coming into the said community for any negative behaviors.

Stating this during their end-of-the-year briefing held in Sir White Guest House, Awada Obosi, on Monday, the Commander of the Unit, Mr. Sunday Agbo, otherwise known as Ikanda said they are most grateful to God that despite insecurity ravaging the Southeast States, their area of responsibility has witnessed relative peace, commending the state leadership of AVG as well as the

Community leadership for providing them with logistics that has made them face the challenges of providing security for the people in the sub-community.

Cataloging their achievements within the period in review, the Commander said he and his co-commanders, including their respective staff have lived above board in contending with local security issues, hailing both current and already redeployed Divisional Police Offices, DPOs in Awada Police Division for having worked in synergy with them in making sure that the residence of Awada Layout sleeps with their two eyes closed.

Assuring the people in the area of having redoubled their efforts in ensuring that the tempo of proper neighborhood watch, which Awada Layout was known for is sustained during this period, AVG advised both landlords and tenants to endeavor to switch off all their electrical

appliances while traveling for the Yuletide celebrations.

Rating the Hon. Commissioner for Homeland Affairs, Chief Chikodi Anarah, and the state Head of Operations, AVG, Chief Chinenye Ihenkor, Okpompi high in the administration and operations of the State Vigilant group, the Obosi Urban Commanders of AVG said the two big shots in AVG has contributed immensely to their achievements in the period in review.

"This is a festive period and we are aware that some people will travel home for merriment, we, therefore, urged everyone to endeavor to put off all their electrical appliances before traveling to avoid had I known as this winter period needs total care of your property cum lives as our assurance is that we are going to work in synergy with other law enforcement agents in safeguarding both lives and property entrusted into our hands within the period".

Imo oil communities demand urgent completion of Assa-Ohoba-Obosima road

Oil communities in the Assa North cluster, Ohaji-Egbema council area of Imo, have called on the Anoh Gas Processing Company (AGPC) to expedite work on the Assa-Ohoba-Obosima rural road.

The call is contained in a statement signed by the spokesperson for the cluster, Duke-Bright Enyia, and made available to journalists in Owerri on Monday. The Assa North cluster circles Assa, Obile, Ochia, Awarra, Ohoba and Obosima communities. Mr Enyia said that despite entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the AGPC in its four years of existence in the area, the company had failed to complete the project that it started in 2019.

He described the road as the communities' lone access to Owerri, the state capital and advised AGOC to transfer the construction contract to another firm since the current handlers failed to execute the project.

"The Assa-Ohoba-Obosima road that links our communities to neighbouring communities and, importantly, Owerri, has been destroyed by heavy trucks used for construction work on their site," he said.

He added that the community had been denied benefits enshrined in the local content policies and the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA),

such as access to electricity, quality healthcare and adequate infrastructure.

He further lamented the indiscriminate pollution of the environment by AGPC, which he said had negatively impacted the lands, rendering them unsuitable for farming, thus compromising the farmers' ability to provide for their families.

He decried the "selective employment practises where job opportunities meant for locals were given to fictitious

individuals unknown to the community, contrary to the MoU and the provisions of the PIA."

Mr Enyia urged the AGPC to honour their agreements with the host communities, return all local content jobs and contracts to the communities, and empower the youth as part of their corporate social responsibilities. Reacting, AGPC's Project Management Officer, Obiana Madumere, said the allegations would be addressed accordingly.

Police intercept couple trafficking one-month old baby in Anambra

The Police Command in Anambra has arrested a couple suspected to be trafficking one month old baby from Lagos to Onitsha.

This is contained in a statement signed by the State Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Tochukwu Ikenga, and made available to newsmen on Tuesday in Onitsha. Ikenaga said that the interception was made at Bridgehead in Onitsha on Sunday.

According to him, the couple was travelling in a luxury bus belonging to a popular transport company with the baby when a co-passenger observed that the mother could not breastfeed the baby despite its cry for food in the course of the journey.

"The good samaritan put a call through to Anambra Police on its Control Room

hotline in Awka which then relayed the information to the Police at Bridgehead in Onitsha.

"The Police laid in wait for the luxury bus described and intercepted it in the evening hours. The couple and the baby were identified and brought down for questioning," he said.

He noted that she confessed buying the child from its mother in Ajah, Lagos for the sum of N30,000. He further said that the Commissioner of Police, Aderemi Adeoye, thanked the public spirited citizen for his humane concern in giving the information that led to the rescue of the child.

He stressed that Adeoye commended the police operatives for their vigilance and dedication to duty.

News

Budget performance: Uzodimma berated over high spending on Gov's office, neglect of key sectors

The Governor of Imo State, Senator. Hope Uzodimma, has been criticized by a civil society organization for prioritizing his office over the state's social sector budget implementation in the third quarter of 2023.

The group, Policy Alert, in a statement signed by its Programme Officer, Fiscal Reforms and Anti-Corruption, Faith Paulinus, said it was worrisome that expenditure in the office of the governor is given preference over key sectors in the state.

The statement made public after a review of the Imo State Third Quarter Budget Performance Report 2023 (July - September), observed that while the entire Min-

istries, Departments, and Agencies in the State had only N7.37bn capital release, the Office of the Governor alone had a total expenditure of N11.84bn which is 60.6 percent above what all other sectors in the state received during the quarter.

The group which works to promote fiscal and ecological justice in the Niger Delta noted that "A trend analysis reveals that the priority given to the Office of the Governor has been unnecessarily high. For instance, for the last three quarters of 2023 (January -September) the office of the Governor has had a release of N31.5bn which is already 95 percent of the N33.1bn budgeted for the office for the entire 2023 fiscal year.

"If the spending trend continues in the last quarter, there is a strong likelihood that the State Government may engage in extra-budgetary expenses for the office of the Governor."

While noting that there is nothing wrong in making expenditures to the Office of the Governor if there was a budget for the expenses, the organization said what is worrisome is the total neglect of social sectors which had zero capital release during the quarter.

"It is unthinkable that no capital expenditure was made for the social sector during the quarter. This is the sector that warehouses Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Education, Health,

Youth and Social Development, and Women's Affairs and Vulnerable Groups.

"In addition, there was also no capital release for Agriculture and food security". Policy Alert called on the state government to give more attention to the social sector in the last quarter of 2023 stressing that for the entire Social Services Sector to get only a capital release of N4.17bn for the three quarters (only 14 percent of N29.74bn budgeted for the year), means that citizens were seriously being starved of social services.

The organization further noted that recurrent spending during the quarter stood at N18.76bn while capital spending was just N7.37bn, and urged the government of Imo State to stop prioritizing recurrent expenditure over capital expenditure.

8 key resolutions reached as Tinubu resolves Rivers crisis

A glimmer of hope emerged in the political turmoil plaguing Rivers State as President Bola Tinubu's intervention on Monday yielded a significant breakthrough.

After a crucial meeting with key figures from both sides, an eight-point resolution was signed, outlining steps to navigate the crisis and restore peace. Both Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his political rival, former governor and current Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, were present and committed to the agreement. The resolution, signed by a diverse group including security officials, party leaders, and legislative figures, signals a potential turning point in the months-long conflict.

Key Points of the Resolution:

1. Governor Fubara and his allies will withdraw all court cases related to the crisis.
2. The State House of Assembly will drop impeachment proceedings initiated

against Fubara.

3. The leadership of the House, under Speaker Martin Amaewhule, a Wike loyalist, will be recognized, along with the 27 lawmakers who defected from the Peoples Democratic Party.

4. Governor Fubara will re-present the 2024 budget to the Amaewhule-led Assembly.

5. Salaries and benefits for all Assembly members and staff will be restored.

6. The Assembly will have autonomy to choose its location and conduct business without interference from the Executive.

7. The Governor will re-submit the names of resigned commissioners for approval.

8. The dissolution of local governments is declared null and void.

This resolution marks a significant step towards de-escalating the tension in Rivers State.

The willingness of both factions to compromise and adhere to the agreement is crucial for restoring normalcy and stability to the region.



The Assistant Commandant General (ACG) in charge of Zone K, Headquarters Awka, Solomon T Iyamu, fsi, during a courtesy visit to the palace of His Majesty Pharm. Alex Uzo Onyido (Ezechaumagha of Ogidi Kingdom) the traditional ruler of Ogidi, Idemili North LGA of Anambra State on Tuesday

Anambra NSCDC solicits support of traditional rulers to tackle insecurity

...Hails Igwe Ogidi for erecting a building for NSCDC

From Uchenna Ezeadigwe, Awka

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in recognition of the indispensable role traditional rulers can play in the nation's quest for a thorough Security has called on them to use their influential and privileged positions to forge a symbiotic relationship between the security agencies and their subjects.

The Assistant Commandant General (ACG) in charge of Zone K, Headquarters Awka, Solomon T Iyamu, fsi, made the appeal on Tuesday 19th of December, 2023 during a courtesy visit to the palace of His Majesty Pharm. Alex Uzo Onyido (Ezechaumagha of Ogidi Kingdom) the traditional ruler of Ogidi, Idemili North LGA of Anambra State. He

added that just as security is the business of everybody so it is for traditional rulers who are custodians of indigenous customs and culture of the people.

He appealed to the custodians of culture to exercise purposeful leadership in security management of their respective communities by mobilizing their subjects towards providing useful information to the Corps to enhance its crime prevention in the country.

The ACG on behalf of the Commandant General, Ahmed Abubakar Audi, PhD, mni OFR, appreciated the Monarch for initiating the idea of building a tactical outpost still under construction for Civil Defence at Ogidi.

According to him, when completed and handed over to the Corps, will be used for the purpose it was meant

in bringing relative peace to the community and its environs. He assured his host of NSCDC readiness and positive disposition towards collaborating with relevant stakeholders like the traditional rulers to effectively degrade the activities of vandals, economic saboteurs and criminal elements in the country.

"I am here to familiarize myself with your Majesty, solicit for your Majesty's blessings and cooperation in our efforts to fight insecurity in the state."

We may not achieve our desired results if we fail to work closely with the traditional rulers considering their positions in the society as fathers in their respective domains. "That is why I have come to seek for your support and explore the influence and prestige of your office for successful outcomes", he said.

Uzodimma's aide demands justice over alleged attempted murder, property destruction

By Ikenna Orioha

The Special Adviser to Governor Hope Uzodimma on Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe University, Ogboko, Ideato South and a chieftain of APC in Ngor-Okpala LGA, Hon. Bona Nwoke Dike, has demanded that the full weight of the law be meted out to those who allegedly destroyed his family house and attempted to kill him and his father who is said to be 95 years old.

Dike who spoke recently in Owerri, alleged that the hoodlum who destroyed over 15 aluminium window glasses and doors of his family house when he missed the opportunity to kill him, his aged father, as well as one of the assassins who was arrested and detained while invading the Magistrate Court at Umuneke with two others at large with the intent to free their gang member (Stanley Dike), were allegedly sent by some APC members at the locality because he refused them their request of giving the Governor, Senator Uzodimma, a bad name by hijacking election logistics.

Dike noted that his refusal to compromise on election logistics, rather insisted for the right thing to be done so as to ensure victory for the Governor and APC was what angered the hoodlum and his conspirators to murder him and his

father.

Our reporter who visited the scene at Amaeke Ngor, Ngor Okpala, learnt that the suspect, Stanley Dike, was arraigned before the Magistrate Court at Okpala two weeks ago and his accomplices made another brutal attempt to attack the victim right inside the court premises.

"I want justice to prevail so that it will serve as a deterrent to others like Dike Stanley, the suspect in the community. I have not slept well since that ugly incident. The attack was better imagined than witnessed in one's lifetime", he said.

He stated that the attack happened on Monday 13th November, 2023 while he was in his living room attending to some opposition members who worked for APC and supporters of Governor Hope Uzodimma to appreciate them for voting his candidate in the two booths in his village during the election, saying the attacker stormed his house uninvited while he was addressing the party supporters and rushed to hit him on the eyes before those around: Chimaraoke, Enyinna and Ezema held him back and managed to drag him out of the compound.

Dike said after the attacker was dragged out, he returned to the compound for the second time, stark naked, armed with a short axe, rake and a piece of iron to attack him, adding that

the man ran riot and started breaking all the window glasses he could lay his hands on.

The APC chieftain who hinted that the incident was reported at Ngor-Okpala Divisional Police Headquarters where the attacker was detained after he was discharged from hospital, asked those who are bent at destroying APC at the LGA to be mindful of their actions.

According to an eye witness, the "offence the Governor's appointee committed was that he did not allow the people who dislike APC and the Governor to mismanage the logistics meant for all APC members to be shared among them alone while the people who worked would be left with peanuts".

Hence, the Chief Magistrate Court of Okpala had transferred the case to Owerri for security reasons, lamenting that safety of her life and the lives of others are at risk if the matter is decided at Umuneke, Ngor-Okpala Magistrate Court, as hoodlums had invaded the court on November 29 and made fruitless attempt to rescue their detained gang member, the suspect and harm the complainant.

Meanwhile, the suspect, Stanley Dike, had pleaded guilty before the police and the magistrate court..

News

Imo Police tasks journalists to prioritize public safety in reportage

The Assistant Commissioner of Police in-charge of Administration and Finance, Imo State Command, ACP Edwin Nkpa receiving an Appreciation Award on behalf of the Commissioner, CP Aboki Danjuma from the Imo Council of NUJ at the closing ceremony of their Press Week held weekend in Owerri Journalists in Imo State have been urged to consider the security implications and impact of their news contents on the general public before publishing them.

The charge was made by the state governor, Sen. Hope Uzodinma and the Commissioner of Police, CP Aboki Danjuma at the closing ceremony of Imo State chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, NUJ Press Week, held in Owerri, week end.

Governor Uzodinma represented by the Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Hon. Declan Emelumba said the media, "having the knowledge of its inherent power to make or mar the society, should prioritize news reports that promote unity, peace and security rather than otherwise."

The governor also reiterated his continued support for journalism practice, and reassured his commitment to general welfare and security of media practitioners in the state. Also, the Imo CP who was the Guest Speaker at the media event, represented by the Assistant Commissioner of Police in charge of Administration and Finance,

ACP Edwin Nkpa in his lecture titled, "The role of the Media in Combating Insecurity," advised the media to focus more on the efforts and achievements of the security agencies in fighting crimes and criminality in the society instead on their inadequacies.

CP Danjuma said, "the media should stop focusing mostly on the inadequacies of the security operatives as this could erode the confidence of the public on the security operatives. This could lead to less support from the public.

"The security agencies are making successes and breakthroughs on regular basis despite all the constraints. Therefore, the media should rather partner and focus more on their achievements for the good of the society." He continued, "the role of the media should also be to educate the citizens to shun violence and criminal activities. The Influence of mass media on public opinion regarding perception of crime in the society is undeniable.

"The specific way in which the media are presenting crimes is often exaggerated and even sensational and therefore, gives information which are often grounded on emotions, sentiments and political bias rather than facts.

"Sensationalistic reporting on crime leads to increased viewership and readership which results in making more money by the publisher, but one of the consequences is a false image about the nature and scope of crimes. Ironically, this cause fear and

panicking in the society."

"Finally, the media as a veritable tool in fighting insecurity must work in synergy with the police and other security agencies in ensuring that crimes and criminalities are brought to the barest minimum in Imo State in particular and Nigeria in general."

Imo police boss added. In the same vein, the Chairman of the event, a renowned businessman and philanthropist in the state, Chief Obioma Success Akagburuonye in his remark said, "I strongly advise you journalists to always be professional, fair and balanced, also bear the interest of the nation at heart, and more importantly, have the fear of God in discharging your tasking, onerous and risky responsibilities.

"Also, as journalists, you should be in the forefront of identifying, attracting, and popularising Godly people into positions of governance, leadership and authority who will, doubtlessly, be committed to selfless and sacrificial service to the benefit of the people.

The Word of God says that, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: But when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" – Proverbs 29:2." Highlights of the event included presentation of Achievement, Excellence, Service and other categories of award to deserving personalities including CP Aboki Danjuma, Sen. Ostia Izuna so, Pastor Bright Chimezie Njoku, Chief Executive Officer/Publisher of Horn Group of Newspapers among others.

'Ezeife displayed unwavering commitment to democracy - Ozigbo

Former governorship candidate in Anambra State, Valentine Ozigbo has described the death of former Anambra State governor, Dr Chukwuemeka Ezeife as a profound loss to Nigeria. Ozigbo, who joined the Ezeife Dynasty and the people of Igbo-Ukwu in mourning the loss of whom he described as "a father and great icon", added that Ezeife was had an unwavering commitment to the ideals of democracy and national development.

"With profound respect and a heart full of memories, I join countless others to mourn the loss of a great icon, Okwadike Ndigbo, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife. His transition to glory leaves an irreplaceable void not only in our lives but in the annals of Nigerian history," Ozigbo said in a statement personally signed.

He noted that Ezeife was a father to him, said the late elder statesman was a man of immense stature, wisdom and more than just a political leader or a public figure.

"His generosity knew no bounds, his kindness touched innumerable lives, and his wise counsel guided many through turbulent times. "From his distinguished career as an academic at Harvard University to his tenure in public service as a Federal Permanent Secretary

to his impactful tenure as the first Executive Governor of Anambra State, Dr. Ezeife was a beacon of integrity, dedication, and visionary leadership.

"His role as a Political Adviser to the President and a Presidential Aspirant was marked by his unwavering commitment to the ideals of democracy and national development.

"Dr. Ezeife's departure is not just the loss to Ndi Anambra or the loss of a statesman; it's the fading of a guiding star that shone brightly in the sky of Nigerian politics. His legacy, however, remains immortalised in the many lives he touched and the profound contributions he made to our nation," Ozigbo added.

The former governorship candidate prayed for the repose of the soul of the departed and urged Nigerians to imbibe the lessons and tall ideals that Ezeife stood for. "As we prepare to bid him farewell in a befitting State Burial, let us celebrate his extraordinary life and cherish the invaluable lessons he imparted," Ozigbo continued.

"May his soul find eternal rest in the loving embrace of the Almighty, and may his spirit continue to inspire us towards creating a more just, equitable, and prosperous Nigeria. "

Farewell, Okwadike. You were truly a father, a mentor, and a towering figure whose absence will be deeply felt. Your journey on earth was a testament to a life well-lived in service to humanity. Rest in peace, great son of Igbo-Ukwu," Ozigbo ended.

River crisis: Tinubu mustn't be allowed to turn our Nation into Banana Republic – Kola Ologbodinyan

Former National Publicity Secretary of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Kola Ologbodinyan has warned that President Bola Tinubu should not be allowed to turn the nation into a banana republic. Issuing this warning in the wake of the move by President Tinubu to settle the ongoing rift between the Rivers state governor, Siminalayi Fubara and his predecessor, Nyesom Wike, Ologbodinyan argued that the declaration of the president regarding the political crisis was unconstitutional adding that it ran foul of the 1999 constitution. He argued that the law provides that the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, conducts an election to replace the lawmakers who decamped from the PDP to join the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Rivers state. "The Asiwaju Decla-



Mayor of Umuhia North Local Government Area of Abia State Hon. High Chief Victor Ikeji (Right) endorsing the Abia Christmas Village Festival project with the Festival coordinator Emenike Jason Iroegbu (left).

Anambra police arrest couple who bought one month old baby for N30,000

The police in Anambra State have arrested a couple for trafficking a one month old baby into Anambra State from Lagos. The couple confessed to buying the child for N30,000, after they were arrested at Bridgehead Onitsha, while travelling into Anambra from Lagos, after a tip-off by a fellow passenger.

In a press release by the spokesperson of the State Police Command, DSP Tochukwu Ikenga, he said: "The interception was made at Bridgehead in Onitsha on 17th December, 2023. The police in Anambra State have arrested a couple for trafficking a one month old baby into Anambra State from Lagos.

The couple confessed to buying the child for N30,000, after they were arrested at Bridgehead Onitsha, while travelling into Anambra from Lagos, after a tip-off by a fellow passenger.

In a press release by the spokesperson of the State Police Command, DSP Tochukwu Ikenga, he said: "The interception was made at Bridgehead in Onitsha on 17th December, 2023.

"The couple was travelling in a

Luxury bus belonging to a popular transport company with the baby when a co-passenger observed that the mother could not breastfeed the baby despite its cry for food in the course of the journey.

"The good samaritan put a call through to Anambra Police on its Control Room hotline in Awka, which then relayed the information to the police at Bridgehead in Onitsha.

"The police laid in wait for the luxury bus and intercepted it in the evening hours. The couple and the baby were identified and brought down for questioning. "They confessed buying the child from its mother in Ajah, Lagos for the sum of N30,000."

Ikenga said the Commissioner of Police, CP Aderemi Adeoye thanked the public spirited citizen for his concern. He directed that the couple be handed over to the National Agency for Prohibition in Trafficking of Persons, NAP-TIP, for further investigation and prosecution, while the baby has been handed over to the Ministry of Women Affairs for care by the State Government.

rations on Rivers State are unconstitutional and a wholesome abuse of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). The law is that @inecnigeria holds election in the vacant seats of the Rivers House of Assembly in line with the provisions of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). @officialABAT, as a major beneficiary of our constitutional democracy, must not be allowed to turn our nation into a banana republic where anything goes," Ologbodinyan said. Recall that after a meeting with Tinubu on Monday, Wike and Fubara signed a pact that all impeachment proceedings initiated against the Governor by the State House of Assembly should be dropped immediately. Also, all matters instituted by Governor Fubara and his team at the court shall be withdrawn immediately, and the governor shall henceforth

not interfere with the full funding of the State Assembly. Another resolution reached at the meeting was that the leadership of the Rivers Assembly led by Martin Amaewhule shall be recognised alongside 27 members who resigned from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), among others. However, members of the PDP have continued to fault President Tinubu for the resolution he reached with the Rivers governor after the meeting that was held in Abuja on Monday. Also, the Special Adviser to President Bola Tinubu on Media and Publicity, Ajuri Ngelale declared that the President has no political motive for intervening in the political crisis which rocked Rivers State. He stated that the interest of the President is to see peace prevail in the oil-rich state adding that Tinubu is the father of the nation.

Crime

75-yr-old Grandma arrested for allegedly dealing on illicit drugs

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has arrested a 75-year-old Nigerian woman, Sekinat Soremekun for allegedly dealing in hard drugs at her residence in Lagos.

This was confirmed in a press statement released on Sunday by the agency's Director of Media and Advocacy, Femi Babafemi.

According to the statement, the cannabis and codeine syrup were recovered from her during the operation.

The statement reads: "Meanwhile, NDLEA operatives in Lagos on Friday 15th December arrested a 75-year-old grandma, Mrs. Sekinat Soremekun for dealing in illicit drugs. At the time of her arrest in Oshodi area of Lagos, quantities of cannabis and litres of codeine syrup were recovered from her. She claimed her son, Segun who is now at large supplied

her the illicit substances which she retailed."

The statement added that a multi-million-naira mansion located at K-5A/2 Road 14, Victoria Garden City (VGC) estate, Lekki area of Lagos used as a clandestine laboratory for the production of methamphetamine by a convicted drug baron, Okenwa Chris Nzewi, had also been forfeited to the Nigerian government following his successful prosecution and conviction in court by the NDLEA.

The statement reads: "Okenwa was arrested along with his associate, Sunny Okeh Ukah on 30th July 2022 and subsequently arraigned on four counts in charge number FHC/L/527C/2022 at the Federal High Court, Lagos.

"They both pleaded guilty on 17th July, 2023, while they were convicted and sentenced to four and three years imprisonment each with an option of fine of four

million (N4,000,000) naira and three million (N3,000,000) naira respectively in addition to community service for four and three weeks each. His vehicle marked EKY 496 DJ was equally forfeited to the Federal Government.

"To further deny him of enjoying the proceeds of his criminal activity, the NDLEA filed a civil forfeiture charge against the building used as a clandestine laboratory at the Federal High Court Lagos which initially granted an interim forfeiture order that elapsed on 6th December before the final forfeiture on 7th December 2023."

The NDLEA also said, "In Imo, operatives on patrol along Owerri-Onitsha expressway on Thursday, December 14 intercepted a way-billed consignment containing cocaine weighing 2.287kg.

"The shipment coming from Lagos was concealed in cellophane condoms, and heading to Port

Harcourt, Rivers State. A suspect, Isaac Okoh, 45, has already been arrested. No fewer than 10 jumbo bags of cannabis weighing 100kg were recovered from the ceiling of a dealer, Ibrahim Yahaya, 35, when his house was raided in the Tudun Kofa area of Lafia, Nasarawa State on Friday 15th December while he was also arrested.

"At the SAHCO export shed of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, MMIA Ikeja Lagos, over 1.5 million pills of tramadol 225mg and Rohypnol were intercepted in a cargo going to South Africa by NDLEA operatives in collaboration with personnel of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN).

"Two suspects: Bada Olanrewaju Akorede, and Amusan Olufela Sharafadeen have so far been taken into custody in connection with the consignment, which consists: 1,050,000 pills of tramadol 225mg and 510,000 tablets of rohypnol.

"At the Federal Capital Territory, FCT Abuja, operatives on Friday 15th December intercepted a consignment of 1,496 bottles of codeine syrup at A.Y.A area of the city while a suspect, Ozioma Enoja, 31, was arrested in a follow up operation.

Another consignment of 400 bottles of the same opioid coming from Port Harcourt, Rivers state was also seized along Abaji-Abuja highway on Saturday 16th December after which a suspect, Bala Ishaq was arrested during a follow-up operation at Zuba motor park.

"While 17 bags of cannabis sativa weighing 195.8kg stored in a bush at Gbanke village, Orhion-

mwon LGA, Edo state were recovered by NDLEA operatives on Wednesday 13th December, anti-narcotic officers in Ogun state intercepted two suspects: Edun Olowokou and Tunde Elijah at Alamutu roundabout area of Abeokuta with bags of same psychoactive substance weighing 279kg.

"In Borno state, NDLEA officers on Tuesday 12th December arrested Bukar Ali, 29, and Abacha Alhaji Fantami, 20, with 171kg of cannabis at Ngamdu, Kaga LGA, while three suspects: Jamilu Haruna, 22; Mohammed Hassan, 23; and Aminu Umar, 50, were nabbed with 57kg cannabis on Wednesday 13th December at Tsafe checkpoint, Zamfara state, when they were on their way to Zurumi, a village known as bandits' enclave.

"At least four suspects: Ezekiel Monday Thompson, 56; Hezekiah Ime, 20; Nsikak Okon Jonah, 39; and Chidi Kalu, 44, were arrested with a total of 121kg cannabis and 5.1grams of methamphetamine in parts of Cross River state on Monday 10th December."



Grandma Sekinat

Police arrest Lawmaker caught on camera assaulting Officer in Ogun

A member of the Nigerian House of Representatives representing Ado-Odo/Ota Federal Constituency, Tunji Akinosi has been caught on camera physically assaulting a policeman at the 2023 Iganmode Day Celebration.

The event was held at San go-Ota, in the Ado-Odo/Ota local

government area of Ogun state.

According to reports and a viral video seen by SaharaReporters, the lawmaker was upset when the policeman attached to the convoy of Ogun Deputy Governor, Engr. Noimot Salako-Oyedele was trying to clear the pathway for the deputy governor at the event.

The lawmaker was reportedly

angered when a security operative tried to tell the lawmaker and other guests to move to their reserved seats to clear the pathway for the deputy governor.

He subsequently punched the policeman but some people nearby quickly came to the rescue of the security personnel.

In May, Akinosi was caught on camera threatening to assault a woman.

SaharaReporters reported a video showing the moment Akinosi assaulted a woman for intervening after his vehicle knocked down a street hawker in Lagos.

The woman claimed that Mr Akinosi's black Prado SUV brushed the hawker and knocked him to the ground.

The lawmaker had reportedly ignored the hawker who was groaning in pain, until the woman and other passers-by intervened to demand that he take the hawker to the hospital. Instead, the lawmaker was seen engaging her in an argument.

In the short video, Mr Akinosi is seen charging at the woman who was recording the drama with her phone.

"Madam, if you do that, I am going to injure you," he said.



Egbetokun, IGP.

Imo holds Christmas Carol, Wednesday



Uzodimma

As part of this year's Christmas celebrations, the Imo State Government has scheduled its Carol Service for Wednesday, December 20, 2023. The Christmas Service which is being organised in partnership with the State's Chapter of Christian Association of Nigeria will hold by noon at the Ndubuisi Kanu Square, formerly known as Heroes Square.

According to a statement by the State's Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Hon Declan Emelumba, Governor Hope Uzodimma will lead State officials and prominent Imo sons and daughters to the event. Similarly, the Catholic Archbishop

of Owerri Archdiocese, Most Rev Lucius Iwejuru Ugorji will lead his brother bishops and priests to the ceremony where he will say the opening prayer. Emelumba said the Anglican Bishop of Egbu Diocese, Rt Rev. Geoffrey Enyinnaya Okoroafor will take the gospel reading. All Christian denominations in Imo State are expected to participate in the Service which will feature Christmas Carols and other songs.

The Commissioner disclosed that both indigenes and residents of the State have been invited to be part of the ceremony. He explained that the Christmas Carol has become an annual event to glorify God for His mercy on the people of the State.

Police arrest wife beater lawyer seen on viral in act

The Nigeria Police Force arrested Barrister Ekere Ebong who is seen in a disturbing viral video abusing his wife.

SaharaReporters learnt on Monday that the lawyer was arrested by the Akwa Ibom Police Command and that he would be charged shortly.

"Barr Ekere Ebong who was seen abusing his spouse in a viral video has been arrested by the Akwa Ibom Police Command. To be charged shortly," a police source told SaharaReporters on Monday.

SaharaReporters reported on Sunday that the Minister of Women Affairs, Mrs Uju Kennedy Ohanenye, had condemned Mr Ebong over the disturbing viral video in which he was physically assaulting his wife.

The lawyer who is reportedly based in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital is seen in the video beating his wife whose mouth and nose have been bloodied.

One of their neighbours said the Ebong had been brutalizing his wife every night for four years.

"No be today, I have lived in this compound for four years, every night he would be beating this woman," the neighbour said.

Reacting to the disturbing video, Ohanenye condemned the action of the man on her official X (Twitter handle) handle, saying, "This remains one of the most insane and unbelievable scenes one has seen in the brutalization of women. As I have always emphasised, this is a 'Renewed Hope' government and such an act can not be allowed in our country.

"On that note, the federal Ministry of Women Affairs @FMWA_ng has ordered the arrest of this demonized lawyer Mr Ebong, who must face the law squarely and I promise this act can not be swept under the carpet. Even if the woman decides she doesn't want her husband to be sued, due to family pressure, the man must face the law as justice will have its way."

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Special Report

PRESS CONFERENCE HELD ON THE IMPOSED SETTLEMENT OF PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU ON THE RIVERS STATE CRISIS

By Chief (Dr.) E. K. Clark (19th December, 2023)

Firstly, I wish to commend President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for heeding the various calls, including our own, to mediate in the on-going crisis rocking Rivers State by calling Barr. Nyesome Wike to order so as to restore peace and tranquillity in the State and avert any problem similar to that which occurred in 2013, when Barr. Wike was Minister of State Education. However, the terms of settlement as contained in the Communique issued at the end of the reconciliatory meeting is what is baffling, appalling and unacceptable to the people, especially, the Ijaw ethnic nationality. From the terms of settlement, it is obvious that President Tinubu sees his role as a mediator, to once again, show gratitude to the current Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), for "delivering" Rivers State to him during the past Presidential elections, having first of gratified him by making him the Minister of FCT.

First Observation: The composition of the attendees of the meeting was one sided in favour of Nyesome Wike, the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), because while Martins Amaewhule, a former Speaker, (because he has automatically lost his seat the very moment he decamped to another political party), was present at the meeting, it would have only been equitable and expedient, for Edison Ehie, the Speaker as affirmed by constitutional provisions and by the granting of the court, to be in the meeting, if there were sincerity of purpose.

The 8 resolutions reached, are the most unconstitutional, absurd and obnoxious resolutions at settling feuding parties that I have ever witnessed in my life. As a matter of fact, some medias captured it very well when they described it as Directives. And for the fact that such thing was done at the Villa, the seat of the Federal Government of Nigeria, is sacrilegious, because any place housing or is a custodian of symbol of authority, ought to be sacred. It is obvious that Governor Siminialayi Fubara was ambushed and intimidated into submission. President Tinubu should know that with all the powers he possesses, he cannot override the Constitution. From all that transpired at the meeting, the laws of the land have not been obeyed. President Tinubu simply sat over a meeting where the Constitution, which is the fulcrum of his office as President and which he swore to uphold and abide by, was truncated and desecrated. 27 or so members (because the figure is not certain), of the Rivers State House of Assembly left the political party on which platform they were elected. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is very clear on that. Section 109 is quite clear on that and it says:

A member of a House of Assembly shall vacate his seat in the House if Being a person whose election to the House of Assembly was sponsored by a political party, he becomes a member of another political party before the expiration of the period for which that House was elected: Provided that his membership of the later political party is not as a result of a division in the political party of which he was previously a member or of a merger of two or more political parties or factions by one of which he was previously sponsored; The Speaker of the House of Assembly shall give effect to subsection (1) of this section, so however that the Speaker or a member shall first present evidence satisfactory to the House that any of the provisions of that subsection has become applicable in respect of the member.

Nyesome Wike is quite abreast of these constitutional provisions. He shouted his voice hoarse calling for the removal of persons like David Umahi as Governor of Ebonyi State, Ben Ayade as Governor of Cross River



Edwin Clark

State and Bello Matawalle as Governor of Zamafara State, when they decamped from the PDP on which platform they were elected into office, to the APC, citing the above constitutional provisions. What has changed?

A Court of competent jurisdiction has pronounced Edison Ehie as the Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly. That Ruling has not been vacated, and based on that he exercised the duties conferred on him by Section 109(2) as quoted above, when the 27 or so members openly defected to APC, waving the flags of the party and singing President Tinubu's campaign songs, from the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). As at today and going by the Constitution, the Rivers State House of Assembly has four members who are recognised by the laws of the land Therefore, on what premise is Mr. President saying that the 27 decamped members should go back to the House? Under what political party, the PDP or the APC. The directives of Mr. President is absurd and cannot hold water. Mr. President should be aware that Siminialayi Fubara, today, is the elected Governor of Rivers State in the same manner Bola Ahmed Tinubu is the elected President of the country. And as a Governor, Mr. Fubara possesses all the powers as conferred on him by the Constitution.

2. Re-Submission of the names of Commissioners who have resigned their Appointments:

Another "directive" of Mr. President that the names of the Commissioners who were nominated by Nyesome Wike and who resigned on their own volition, and who have lost their trust in Governor Fubara, should be represented to the Rivers State House of Assembly for clearance to become Commissioners again, is ridiculous. Who is nominating them to become Commissioners again? Is it Mr. President? Was Mr. President thinking that he was mediating in a matter between Nyesome Wike and employees in Nyesome Wike's private company? Is it what Nyesome Wike means when he talks about "structure", referring to Rivers State as his personal holdings or enterprise?

3. Re-Presentation of a Budget already signed and passed into Law: Another unthinkable "directive" of Mr. President is that a Budget which has been passed into Law, should be represented. It is absolutely ridiculous and unconstitutional.

By President Tinubu's actions and directives, he has overruled the Constitution of the country; he has shaken the foundation of the country's democracy. People lost their lives fighting for democracy in this country. Today, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, has made of no effect the blood of the freedom fighters shed to salvage this country. He has thrown the country's democracy fifty years backwards; this is unacceptable. Rather than building a strong system and society, we are building strong, invidious characters, with our national patrimony through corruption and avarice.

By the actions of President Bola

Ahmed Tinubu, he has really shown his dislike and disdain for the Ijaw people. and confirms his hatred for them. And as the leader of the Ijaws, we will resist it.

Nyesome Wike is not an emperor. For the eight years he was in power as Governor of the Rivers State, he ruled with an iron fist. As Governor, he will not accept such treatment from anyone, as he is spear heading to be meted out to the current Governor of the State, Siminialayi Fubara. Barr. Wike destroyed his opponent's houses and even threatened to kill them as cried out by Senator Lee Maiba from Ogoni, and Dr. Abiye Sekibo from Okrika

It is still fresh in our memory, how Nyesome Wike, as Minister of State, Education, used federal might to fight the then Governor of Rivers State, Chibuike Amaechi that almost led to the grinding to a halt of governance in Rivers State when the Judiciary was closed down and the House of Assembly was shut down by the then Governor, Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi. President Jonathan did not interfere in his action because if he did, he will definitely be breaching Section 5(2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria, which President Tinubu has deliberately breached, despite his oath of office to uphold and promote the Constitution. Nyesome Wike is Minister now, and again, he is using the federal government to truncate the wishes of the people of Rivers State. The rule of law in the country is completely truncated by President Tinubu. While it will be noted that presently, the National Assembly is discussing on the Bill of Local Government Autonomy, President Bola Tinubu is directing Governor Fubara to put into effect, a Bill passed by people who are no longer law makers.

4. The members of the House of Assembly choosing where they will sit to carry out their legislative duties: It is the duty of the executive to provide legislative accommodation for the Houses of Assembly including the National Assembly, and not the members of the House of Assembly to choose a place to meet. It is in this vein that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, in presenting his Budget to the National Assembly, recognised the FCT Minister, Nyesome Nwike, as the land lord, because he is of the executive arm of government. It is the FCT that owns the National Assembly complex and maintains it. It is, therefore, ridiculous and unconstitutional for President Tinubu to direct, in his settlement, that the members of the Rivers State House of Assembly, should meet wherever they want to meet.

We will resist such draconic, arbitrary and unconstitutional action by Mr. President and his customer Nyesome Wike. We will go to court to challenge this so-called one-sided and oppressive action of Mr. President.

On his part, the Executive Governor of Rivers State, Siminialayi Fubara, who has the mandate of the people of Rivers State to govern them for the next four years, has shown

febleness of character, by agreeing and appending his signature on a document containing such absurdity. He has betrayed the people who elected him as Governor and those who stood behind him in this cause. Mr Fubara has shown naivety in his actions; by signing that document, he has signed his death warrant, believing that the President will show him some sort of favours. Mr. Fubara's mandate is Constitutional and so, he cannot surrender it in the face of intimidation from any quarter. And it is quite unfortunate. Did he go to that meeting to speak and justify his actions, or he went there to take directives from an equally elected President. As Governor of a State and as the Chief Security Officer of the State, he has shown tremendous lack of courage and competence. It will be in his best interest to resign if he cannot govern the State as constitutionally provided, or he may as well decamp and join APC, and be taking directives from Nyesome Wike and President Tinubu on the governance and leadership of the State.

Like I stated earlier, these obnoxious directives will not stand. The people of Rivers State, particularly, the Ijaws, who are in the majority and who have about 11 (eleven) Local Government Areas, out of the 23 Local Government Areas in the State, will resist it. Because by it, President Tinubu has delivered Rivers State to Nyesome Wike as a reward for "delivering" the State to him. I call on the people of Rivers State and indeed all well-meaning Nigerians, to stand up against it, using all Constitutional and legal means, because we do not know the next State in the country that will be affected or pawned to another political customer by President Tinubu, as political patronage. It is absurd, it is draconian. It is transactional. It is a rape of our democracy. The people of Rivers State should remember that it was the same lopsided solution/directive that President Tinubu gave to the people of Ondo State but they resisted and rejected it. Today, the needful has been done in that State.

Bola Ahmed Tinubu would not allow himself to be treated the way he oversaw Mr. Fubara being treated. We all can recall what happened when he governed Lagos State for eight years, and when he successfully resisted President Olusegun Obasanjo's dictatorial tendencies when he tried to prevent him from creating more Local Government Areas in Lagos State. Nigerians hailed Bola Ahmed Tinubu for standing up to the occasion. That made him to be the undisputed leader of Lagos State. But today, he is overseeing such draconian and authoritarian action as President of the country, giving directives to a Governor to take action on things obviously not in tandem with the nation's Constitution.

I, Senator Edwin Kiagbodo Clark, as leader of the Ijaw nation, and as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Ijaw National Congress (INC), decided to hold this emergency Press Conference with the full authority of my people. We are prepared to face any consequences that may result in the political crisis in Rivers State. We will resist any attempt subtle, subterranean, covert, overt, to make an elected Ijaw son, Siminialayi Fubara, the Governor of Rivers State, a servant, a stooge to Nyesome Wike, who had boasted that any attempt by the Governor to touch his so-called 'Wike's structure', with the connivance and support of President Bola Tinubu, will be resisted by us. Like I said, we will go to go court to resist this oppressive action using all available constitutional and legal means. It is on this note I wish to appeal to the youths who are aggrieved, to remain calm, as we will use legal means to dethrone this hydra headed monster, called oppression.

Enough is Enough!

Chief (Dr.) EDWIN Kiagbodo Clark, OFR, CON



Ivory Coast ready for AFCON - Envoy

... As CAF enforces restriction of AFCON streaming

The Ambassador of Ivory Coast to Nigeria, Kalilou Traore, has reiterated his country's readiness to host the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations.

Traore stated this in an interview on Monday in Abuja. The tournament is scheduled to be held from January 13 to February 11. According to the envoy, his country has put all measures in place to ensure a hitch-free tournament.

"This will be one of the biggest events for Africa and you can imagine that all the entire Côte d'Ivoire people are mobilised to make it a very great event. "This is starting from the Head of State, President Alassane Ouattara, and the Prime Minister, who right now is the Minister of Sports and is particularly in charge of the organisation of this

tournament.

"Beyond the government, the population has been mobilised. The tourism sector has been mobilised, the security, the building sector have built many stadiums that will host different matches. "So, all the sectors in Côte d'Ivoire have been mobilised and they are almost ready. "Now, they are fine-tuning all the little things, so that they will be ready before the official opening on Jan. 13."

The envoy explained that the mobilisation has been in terms of budget and overhaul of infrastructure to ensure a successful tournament. "Of course, when I say the whole government is mobilised, it means that officials of the government are mobilised, and the budget of the government is also allocated

for this tournament.

"You know when you want to build six or seven stadiums it will gulp a lot of money, especially when you want to put in place all the facilities," he said. Traore further said the Ivorian government was working closely with the Confederation of African Football to achieve the desired goals. "Each country has to take charge of its own team, but when they bring them into Côte d'Ivoire, the facilities are there for them to use," he said.

He noted that every facility which would facilitate the performance of the teams has been provided by the government of Côte d'Ivoire.

The envoy assured that Ivory Coast and CAF were working together with the various participating countries' football federations to ensure a hitch-free AFCON in the country. "I recently visited the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) president, and he is in touch with his counterparts in Côte d'Ivoire in terms of preparation," he said.

Meanwhile, After confirming that it had received over 5,000 media accreditation applications for the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations in Ivory Coast, the Confederation of African Football was quick to add that it would protect the media (TV) rights holders by restricting filming of the

competition by non-rights holders.

The 34th edition of the AFCON has been scheduled to be held in Ivory Coast from January 13 to February 11, 2024. The media accreditation closed on November 24 and the African football governing body on its website confirmed that more than 70 nationalities have applied to cover Africa's biggest event. CAF also added that the over 5,000 media accreditation applications for the 2023 AFCON in Ivory Coast are 90 percent more than that received for Cameroon in 2021.

"The high demand has necessitated that CAF implement quotas for all the countries due to space demands," read a statement on the CAF website. "CAF remains committed to ensuring that fairness is applied across the board in allocation and implementation of quotas.

"CAF believes in creating access to media and promoting media freedom. To protect the media (TV) rights holders, CAF will introduce new guidelines for non-rights holders and enforce restrictions on filming and other activities."

On its priority list and allocation, CAF said 30 percent of the quotas would be given to the host nation while participating countries would get 35 percent.

Regional (neighbouring) countries will get 10 percent allocations while the rest of the world will be handed 25 percent.

Blow for Peseiro as Moffi suffers hamstring injury

Terem Moffi has emerged as an injury doubt for next year's Africa Cup of Nations in Ivory Coast after the OGC Nice striker suffered a hamstring injury ahead of the club's Ligue 1 fixture against Le Havre on Saturday, PUNCH Sports Extra reports.

The French club announced on their X handle that the Super-Eagles striker was not included in the match-day squad after he suffered the injury hours before their game.

The 24-year-old has been in fine form for Nice so far this season and has featured in all the club's 15 league games before Saturday's game against Le Havre.

Moffi has been an important figure for the Eagles this campaign and has six goal contributions (four goals and two assists) in 15 appearances. Having appeared in all the club's games in the 2023/24 season, the former Lorient forward was on course for his 16th start of the season before picking up the injury that ruled him out of Saturday's 3-1 de

feat – their second of the season – to Le Havre.

"Affected in the ischios, Terem Moffi does not appear on the match sheet, just like Teddy Boulhendi and Daouda Traoré," the club wrote.

According to bab.la online dictionary, ischios is quadriceps dominance theory identifies when the hamstring muscles are notably weaker than the quadriceps muscles.

On the recovery period, exaktealth wrote, "Minor strains that affect only a small portion of the muscle tissue can recover in four to six weeks. More severe strains that affect a large part of the muscle take eight to 12 weeks." While Nice are yet to state the extent of the striker's injury, it is very unlikely that he will resume camp with the squad which put his AFCON spot in jeopardy.

This news will, however, come as a major blow to Jose Peseiro, who is already without Nottingham Forest's Taiwo Awoniyi for the AFCON after the striker picked up a groin injury during the Eagles friendly game against Saudi Arabia in Portugal in October.

CAF on Friday confirmed that all the 24 Participating Member Associations had submitted their provisional squads for the tournament with Moffi almost guaranteed a spot in that list.

With the AFCON set to kick-off January 13, the Portuguese tactician will hope that the striker is fit enough and on time to be able to play at the biennial competition.

With only Victor Osimhen and Victor Boniface the two strikers whose spots are guaranteed barring any injuries, should the Nice striker not be fit in time for the AFCON, Peseiro may have to shift focus to Paul Onuachu, Gift Orban, Akor Adams and Sadiq Umar.



Moffi



Ivory Coast National Team

Arsenal face Porto, Napoli battle Barca in UCL Round of 16

Barcelona will face Napoli, while Arsenal were drawn against Porto on Monday's draw for the Champions League last 16, from which the meeting of last season's runners-up, Inter Milan and Atletico Madrid, appears to be the standout tie with the first legs to take place in mid-February and the return matches in March. Holders Manchester City were

handed a tie against FC Copenhagen.

Below is the draw for the last 16 of this season's UEFA Champions League, made at UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland on Monday:

- FC Porto (POR) V Arsenal (ENG)
- Napoli (ITA) v Barcelona (ESP)
- Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) V

- Real Sociedad (ESP)
- Inter Milan (ITA) V Atletico Madrid (ESP)
- PSV Eindhoven (NED) V Borussia Dortmund (GER)
- Lazio (ITA) V Bayern Munich (GER)
- FC Copenhagen (DEN) V Manchester City (ENG)
- RB Leipzig (GER) V Real Madrid (ESP)

First legs to be played on February 13, 14, 20 and 21; second legs to be played on March 5, 6, 12 and 13.

Man City fined \$150,000 after Haaland, players surround Ref

Premier League champions Manchester City have been fined £120,000 (\$150,000) after players including star striker, Erling Haaland, surrounded the referee following a controversial no-call late in a 3-3 draw against Tottenham.

The incident occurred during stoppage time on December 3 at Etihad Stadium. Referee Simon Hooper opted not to play advantage after Haaland was taken down by Spurs' Emerson Royal, cutting short a potential Man City attack.

"Haaland and teammates surrounded the ref because he failed to play advantage for a potential scoring chance," the Football Association said in a statement Monday.

Video shows Haaland visibly furious immediately after the whistle blew, continuing his complaints post-

match. The Norwegian striker didn't face additional punishment for his conduct. Man City admitted fault for failing "to ensure players did not behave in an improper way." The FA sanction came after an independent hearing.

"Manchester City FC have been fined £120,000 after their players surrounded a match official at the Premier League game against Tot-

tenham. "An independent regulatory commission imposed this sanction following a hearing," the FA remarked.

While City expressed frustration with the pivotal call, manager Pep Guardiola declined to publicly criticise the referee after the match. But the club breached expectations for proper conduct. City, however, will continue their quest to defend the Premier League title amid fierce competition at the top of the table.



Manchester City players surrounding the Ref.



GUEST WRITER

Beyond the Wike-Fubara feud

By Jideofor Adibe

The feud between the former governor of Rivers State and current Minister of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, and Governor Siminalayi Fubara has dominated the headlines the past couple of weeks, with no solution in sight.

The political dogfight has led to moves to impeach Governor Fubara, the decamping of 27 PDP members of the State legislature to APC and the consequent declaration of their seats vacant by a factional Speaker of the State House of Assembly loyal to Governor Fubara, the demolition of the State House of Assembly complex and fears that the conflict is increasingly assuming an ethnic dimension. Attempts by President Tinubu to mediate in the conflict have failed to douse the tension.

There are several issues raised by the Wike-Fubara political dogfight:

One, keen observers of Rivers' State politics do not feel surprised at the pernicious falling out between Nyesom Wike and his political godson, Siminalayi Fubara. In fact, what is happening between Wike and Fubara seems to be part of the DNA of Rivers' State politics especially in the relationship between political godfathers and political godsons in the state where, since 1999, political godsons have always succeeded in running their erstwhile political godfathers out of town.

For instance, Dr. Peter Odili, the first civilian Governor of Rivers State in this current cycle of liberal democracy managed to neutralize his erstwhile godfather, the late Harry Marshall just as he was driven out of town after his tenure by Rotimi Amaechi, who was his political godson. Nyesom Wike, an erstwhile Chief of Staff and political enforcer for Rotimi Amaechi also fought and neutralized Amaechi, his former political godfather in a bitter feud that has lingered for over eight years.

Another seeming trait in the DNA of Rivers politics is that all the Governors of the State since 1999 (apart from Celestine Omehia who had a brief rule from 29 May 2007 to 25 October 2007) nursed the ambition of being President of the country and spent lavishly to achieve that ambition.

Two, strictly speaking, the issue of godfatherism, (or 'my oga at the top' phenomenon) is not alien to the various indigenous cultures in the country. While the terminology in our various indigenous languages will be coterminous to a 'mentor' or 'guardian', in Nigerian politics, it is about power brokers, a patron-client and transactional relationship in which the main goal is for both the client and the patron to use each other to attain selfish goals that have little to do with the general societal good.

Like any business deal, political godfathers invest in their 'godsons', deliver their own part of the bargain (usually elective or appointive office) and expect returns on investment. Across the country, political godfather versus godson feud has hardly favoured the godfather. The epic godfather versus godson dogfights since 1999 include



Governor Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu and his political godfather, Senator Jim Nwobodo; Governor Mala Kachallah of Borno state and his godfather Senator Ali Modu Sherriff, (popularly known as 'SAS'); Governor Chris Ngige and his political godfather Andy Uba in Anambra State, Governor Willie Obiano and his political godfather Peter Obi in Anambra State; former Governor Rauf Aregbesola and his political godson, Gboyega Oyetola in Osun State; Governor Babatunde Fashola and his political godfather Bola Ahmed Tinubu (who also stopped another political godson, Ambode from getting a second term in Lagos State); former Governor Akpabio and his political godson Emmanuel Udom; Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State and his former godson, Theodore Orji; Chimaroke Nnamani and his political godson Sullivan Chime in Enugu State, Kwankwaso and his former political protégé Ganduje in Kano State, Adams Oshiomhole and his former political godson Godwin Obaseki in Edo State; former Governor Wamakko and his former political boy Aminu Tambuwal in Sokoto State; former Governor Imoke and his former political son Ayade in Cross Rivers state; former Governor Akume and his political godson Suswan in Benue State and the late Governor Mbadinuju and his political godfather Emeka Offor in Anambra State.

With the exception of Tinubu in Lagos, nearly all the other fights between political godfathers and political godson Governors ended in favour of the latter. Of course some political godfathers who could not remove outright their 'recalcitrant' political godsons aligned with other forces either to thwart their former scion's second term ambition or to get them removed by the election petition tribunals.

Given that godfather versus godson political dogfight is almost inevitable, and that the godson as Governor almost always wins, why do people still want to play the role of godfathers? In particular why will Governors who are about to conclude their tenures be hell bent on selecting and installing successors when the history of the relationship between the political godfather and the political godson rarely favours the former after the election?

One possible explanation is that Governors concluding their tenure must have

figured out that it may be riskier for someone they did not anoint or install to succeed them than someone they handpicked turning against them with time. The short term benefits of installing a successor by a departing Governor may include covering the backsides of the departing Governor from anti-graft agencies like the EFCC or giving such a Governor at least temporary relief from damaging revelations.

Three, there are fears that the audacity with which Wike is going after Fubara so soon after the elections may be a signpost of the return of the more crude form of godfatherism, which characterized the early years of this cycle of liberal democracy in the country (1999-2007). That form of godfatherism, which can best be described as 'machine politics', is a form of politics characterized by tight organization and a strong centralized leadership, typically in the form of a "boss", with the organization/network dominating the landscape, mafia-style.

Tinubu is arguably Nigeria's most successful political godfather, having been responsible for choosing all the Governors of Lagos State since he completed his tenure as Governor in 2007 and having also played a significant role in the emergence of most of the Governors in the South-west and beyond. Having used the networks he created as godfather of Lagos politics to expand his influence beyond Lagos to some other parts of the country and eventually used that network to become the President of Nigeria, it is possible that some ambitious politicians may be thinking of replicating the Tinubu template in their domain with the hope

of using it to also achieve national political power. If this assumption is correct, we may likely see an increasing 'mafianization' of Nigerian politics by moneybags and former political office holders, especially former governors, as the new groups compete for influence and networks in their domains and beyond.

Four, what is the impact of godfatherism in Nigerian politics? Besides the possible 'mafianization' of Nigerian politics and all it portends, the cost of 'oiling' the structure of the political godfather, (usually by the political godson thieving state resources), could be prohibitive and undermining of development efforts. Similarly, since political godfathers are people who not only have tremendous resources to fund elections but also people who claim to know how to 'win' elections Nigerian-style and how to manage the violence that often attends electoral competition in the country, the seeming return of 'machine politics' could accelerate the current alienation of citizens from the state and its politics. It will also further discourage otherwise competent professionals from getting involved in elective offices.

Five, the current feud in Rivers state could further hurt the image of President Tinubu who has not sufficiently recovered from the controversies that dogged his candidacy during and after the elections. Given the controversy over the role of Wike in the electoral umpire declaring that Tinubu won Rivers' State, popular grapevine and social media talks is that Wike was given the powerful FCT Ministry not just to compensate him for his role in Tinubu winning the last election but also that his being made the FCT Minister is to ensure that he uses the Rivers' State's template to ensure that the APC wins the FCT in 2027 (to avoid the embarrassment of not winning or securing 25 per cent of the votes in the FCT which was one of the grounds of the petitions against him at the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal). It is also believed that the Tinubu government is tacitly supporting his bid to retain the control of the political structures of both the PDP and the APC in Rivers State for the same reason. All these are likely to derogate from the already narrow legitimacy base of the President, especially if the current hardship persists and the myth about his competence continues to wane.

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